

## **Jealousy(?)**

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# **Jealousy(?)**

by [Salted\\_Honey](#)

## Summary

The one where Jihoon has a crush on Sanghyeok but mistakes the feeling for jealousy.

Inspired by the interview where Faker said pro players are bad with feelings.

# Chapter 1

He shined so brightly. Standing on the stage, with a halo of light around him, it felt as if the whole world was watching him. He was poised and calm, the natural curve of his mouth giving him a gentle and serene look despite the fact that he did not smile. A sickening feeling pooled in Jihoon's stomach and each heartbeat felt painful, yet he couldn't look away. The feeling intensified as he watched the rest of T1 swarm around their leader with bright eyes and cheery smiles. The previously controlled expression on Sangheok's face melted into a gentle smile and the look of adoration on his face made Jihoon clench his jaw and dig his nails into his palm.

His eyes burned into the screen as he watched the measured smile break into a carefree look of joy when one of his teammates said something that made him laugh. The tightness in his chest weighed heavier as he watched the joyous scene play on before him. A cold bitterness tingled against his skin.

Jihoon jumped as the screen turned off. For a brief moment, he saw his own angered expression reflected in the dark screen.

"My bad, I think I tripped over the cord," Siwoo said sheepishly, walking into Jihoon's room.

Jihoon shrugged, closing the lid of his computer with shaky hands, "All good."

"Why were you glaring at your screen?" Siwoo asked curiously.

"Nothing," Jihoon grumbled, resisting the urge to cross his arms and pout like a child. Now that he snapped out of his daze, he felt embarrassed at his own immaturity. He should be happy for Sanghyeok like a mature adult.

Siwoo rolled his eyes, "Well obviously it's not nothing."

Jihoon sighed, "What do you think about Sanghyeok-hyung?"

Siwoo blinked in surprise, "Faker? Is this about him?"

"Just answer the question."

"I mean, he's a talented and respectable person. I respect him and appreciate what he does for esports as a whole. Why?"

Jihoon sighed again, "I think I might be a little jealous."

Siwoo sat down next to him, "A little jealousy is natural, we all have those moments of envy. We just have to look past them and keep working hard."

"But it's not just a little jealousy," he admitted, "I feel so....far away from him. I watch every event and interview he does and each time I get this feeling in my chest. Like I want to reach

out and touch him but I can't. He's so radiant. I see the way his teammates look at him and the way he looks at them back. Like they're the only people in the world. It makes me feel like I don't even exist."

Siwoo frowned, "Maybe you should stop watching those things."

"No!" Jihoon said immediately. Just the thought of it made the sick feeling creep back into his chest. "I mean," he hurried to explain, "It would just make me feel anxious not to know how he's doing. I'd just feel even more disconnected from him."

"Why are you two moping in Jihoon's room?" A confused voice sounded from the doorway.

Jihoon looked up to see Geonbu eyeing the two of them in equal parts concern and suspicion.

"I'm not moping." Jihoon grumbled.

"You have the same expression Heosu has whenever he's mad and says he doesn't want to talk about it but he secretly does want to talk about it and then I get in trouble for not prying enough."

Siwoo smacked Geonbu on the arm, "Don't bring up other midlaners right now! Have some tact!"

"You didn't even tell me what was going on!" Geonbu said, bewildered.

"Nothing's going on!" Jihoon protested.

"Jihoonie needs to stop watching videos of Sanghyeok for his own sanity but he's being stubborn." Siwoo said, ignoring Jihoon's protest, "He's getting stupid ideas and forgetting how amazing he is. Have I reminded you recently about how amazing you are? We just won MSI!"

"Stepping away from social media isn't a bad idea." Geonbu agreed.

"No." Jihoon said, clutching his laptop like Siwoo might snatch it out of his hands, "I'm fine. It's not like I can avoid all T1 content forever with how big they are anyway."

Geonbu raised an eyebrow, "All of T1? I thought it was just Sanghyeok?"

"Not all of them, just Gumayusi and Oner. Sometimes."

"What do you have against their jungler and adc?" Siwoo asked with a confused expression.

Jihoon shrugged, "How am I supposed to know?"

Geonbu looked thoughtful, "And you don't get that with Zeus and Keria because...?"

Jihoon shrugged again, "I don't know. Because I know them better? It just wouldn't feel right to be bitter towards them. It would feel weird."

“But you’ve met Sanghyeok too?”

The bitterness rushed back with a vengeance. Jihoon could almost taste it on his tongue. “I wasn’t close with him. He just talked about work usually.” Jihoon said morosely, “He feels so hard to understand and get close to. But whenever he’s with his team he’s like a different person. His face is all lit up and he smiles with his whole mouth. His eyes curve into crescents and suddenly it’s impossible to look away even though I feel a heaviness in my chest. He never looks at me like that. He never smiles at me that way.”

“No, no, don’t take it like that. He’s polite because he respects you and feels like it would be rude to act too familiar. I’m sure he isn’t doing it on purpose to make you feel bad.” Siwoo comforted, “You’re overthinking this. He’s just being polite. It’s not some scheme to make you feel left out.”

“You’re both idiots.”

“What?” Siwoo snapped his head around to look at Geonbu, “What do you mean?”

Geonbu gave them an ‘are you stupid’ look, “Do you even hear yourselves? Jihoon just spent five minutes waxing poetic about how Sanghyeok looks when he smiles. How do you not get it?”

Jihoon stared blankly at Geonbu. Did he say something odd? His observations were definitely not too out of the ordinary, especially if you looked at youtube and twitter comments. Everyone agreed with him!

Geonbu sighed, “Think about it like this. Why do you think you’re jealous that he’s close with his teammates? Are you jealous of him for having close friends? Or are you jealous of his friends for being close to him?”

“Uhhh..” Jihoon stared dumbly at him, “How do I tell?”

Geonbu’s expression twitched, his composure slipping, “Okay, how about this. Why is it you’re off put by Oner and Gumayusi but not the others?”

“Because Zeus and Keria are cute and nonthreatening?” Jihoon said, his answer sounding more like a guess than a response.

“I can’t believe you just called another support cute right in front of me.” Siwoo grumbled.

Geonbu ignored him, “Okay, so what makes Oner and Gumayusi threatening?”

“They’re good and talented players?” Jihoon guessed.

“Jihoon, they don’t even play your role.” Geonbu deadpanned, “Think again why you feel threatened by them.”

“I don’t know!” Jihoon said in exasperation, “I just get irritated when I see photos or videos of them being all tall and handsome and confident and touchy. I just feel like, what do they have that I don’t that makes them so special?”

“Don’t think like that, you’re one of the most special people I’ve ever met.”

“Siwoo, shut up, he’s almost there.” Geonbu interrupted, “Okay Jihoon, why does it bother you that they’re tall and handsome?”

“They’re not that handsome.” He grumbled, “I’m tall too.”

“Why do you feel like you’re competing with them?”

“Because we are?” Jihoon said, confused, “They’re on another team?”

Geonbu sighed, the last of his patience struggling to hold his composure in place, “Yeah, but what the hell does their appearance have to do with competition? Think about it. Why would you be jealous about good looking people being close to Sanghyeok?”

“They’re not that good looking.” Jihoon said with a pout.

“Okay I give up. Have fun running in circles.”

“Come on,” Jihoon whined, not caring that he sounded like a child, “Just tell me what you were thinking.”

“Go spend some time with Keria, that’s all I’ll say. I’m too old for this shit.”

“You’re younger than I am!” Jihoon called after him, not getting a response. He turned back to Siwoo, “Why did he say I should go see Keria? Did you understand what he was going on about?”

“Something about you feeling insecure about appearance?” Siwoo guessed, “Do you think it’s that? Are you feeling down about how you look? No offense to my fellow players but we play games for a living and don’t shower until the day before we go on stage. Comparatively, you’re practically a supermodel.”

Jihoon plucked at a string on his pajama pants, “You think I’m better looking than Oner?”

“Jihoon-ah, that guy’s Lee sin in real life. I think we’re all out of luck on that one. You’re definitely cuter than him though.”

“Should I start working out?” Jihoon fretted, “What if I’m not fit enough? People prefer muscular men right?”

“Stop worrying. You’re tall, handsome, and cute even when you whine and make me peel oranges for you. Making comparisons won’t get you anywhere. Everyone has a certain type they like, there’s no universal preference for anything. If you want to go to the gym you should do it because it’s what you want for yourself, but because you’re trying to achieve some nonexistent standard.”

“I just want to be more impressive.”

“You *are* impressive. What the heck are you on?”

"No, but...I wanna be impressive to-" Jihoon bit his lip. He wanted to look impressive to Sanghyeok. He wasn't sure why. Being admired by someone that other people admired was something everyone wanted right?

"I want Sanghyeok hyung to find me impressive." he admitted.

"He already does. I'm pretty sure he's mentioned you in interviews before."

Jihoon shook his head in frustration, "No it's different. I want him to look at me. I want him to look at me like I'm special. Like he looks at his teammates."

"He's only like that because they're teammates and spend a lot of time together. It doesn't mean you're lacking or anything."

"Yeah but-" Jihoon frowned, pulling his knees to his chest, "I want to be like that with him too. But not the way he is with Wooje where he spoils him and looks at him like a proud parent. I don't want him to treat me like a kid. I want him to think I'm dependable and mature. Like how he is with Gumayusi."

"I'm not gonna lie, I'm kinda lost here. Is this still about your appearance? And didn't you say you were jealous of Sanghyeok? Not his teammates? I'm also pretty sure he dotes on all his teammates the same but it's not quite as obvious with Gumayusi and Oner. If anything Minseok is the one he dotes on the least even though he looks the youngest."

Jihoon groaned in frustration, "I don't know anymore. I feel weird when I look at him. And I feel weird when I look at his teammates with him. But I can't stop looking at him. I need to."

"I suck at this. Should we call Geonbu back?" Siwoo suggested.

"Geonbu hyung went to see his boyfriend," Suhwan's voice said from the doorway, "Are you okay hyung? You look stressed."

"Good timing Suhwan, come here and convince him he's talented and hot so he'll stop moping."

"I- what?"

"Maybe that's why Geonbu was acting all wise and emotionally mature, because he's got a boyfriend now!" Siwoo complained, "He's acting like he wasn't freaking out over how to ask Heosu out for a good month before he did it. Did you know he wrote 20 different scripts? And they all sucked."

"I liked the final version," Suhwan piped up, "And that one worked didn't it? Is that what we need Geonbu hyung for? Love advice? What, did Jihoon hyung get rejected or something?"

"No!" Jihoon huffed, feeling offended, "I wasn't rejected!"

"What happened then?"

"Nothing happened!"

“So you haven’t asked them out yet?”

“I’m not asking anyone out!” Jihoon exclaimed, feeling his cheeks heat up.

“Oh. Then what did you need Geonbu hyung’s advice for?”

“Nothing. He wasn’t even helpful anyway.” Jihoon grumbled, “All he did was keep prying into unrelated things and then tell me to ask Minseok for dinner.”

“You have a crush on Minseok????”

“What?” Jihoon snapped his head around to look at Soohwan, “I don’t have a crush on Minseok! Where did you get that?”

“Oh.” Soohwan looked sheepish, “Well that’s probably a good thing. Minhyung hyung would probably kill you.”

“Gumayusi? Why?”

Jihoon felt particularly judged as their youngest member looked at him like he was an idiot.

“Have you seen how he looks at Minseok? And how he looks at anyone that gets anywhere near him?”

Jihoon stared blankly at him, “No....?”

“I’m 110% sure he has a huge crush on Minseok hyung. I don’t think they’re together though, so he spends a lot of time chasing people off with a stick. It makes sense, Minseok is really cute. But don’t tell him I said that.”

“Oh.” For some reason the knowledge that Minhyung was already interested in someone else made him feel relieved. That was one less person to compete with. He frowned, confused for a second at his own thoughts. What was he competing for?

“How did you not know that?” Siwoo said with a laugh, “I remember seeing that video of Minseok sitting in your lap and fearing for your life.”

“That was one time!” Jihoon said, not fully sure why he felt the need to defend himself, “Soohwan can you tell Minhyung that Minseok isn’t my type so he doesn’t get the wrong idea and kill me when I ask him to dinner?”

“Okay Hyung.” he acquiesced, not even bothering to question the absurd request.

“So you’re taking Geonbu’s advice after all?”

Jihoon shrugged noncommittally, “He was acting like he knew something I didn’t. Might as well give it a try.”

Something about the situation made Jihoon inclined to trust the advice. Maybe it was because he was able to get himself a boyfriend? Although that had nothing at all to do with Jihoon’s

situation. Not like it was relevant. At all. In any way. It was just proof he knew more about feelings and emotions, that's all.

Before he could question himself, he sent the text. No turning back.

## Chapter 2

“Hyung! You’re here!” Minseok greeted him with a smile and a hug. It was good to see that even after the time apart the rapport they had built up hadn’t faded at all.

“Minseokie!” Jihoon couldn’t help but smile. There was something about the shorter boy that made him feel warm and fuzzy. He ruffled Minseok’s hair, ignoring the squawk of protest, “It’s good to see you again.”

Jihoon stiffened and pulled away when he caught sight of a very irritated looking Minhyung standing a couple of feet away.

He cleared his throat, “Oh, uh, Minhyung-ssi. I didn’t see you there. How are you?”

The glare dissolved into a pleasantly polite smile, which was somehow more threatening.

“I’m doing well, thank you. I was just keeping Minseokie company so he wouldn’t get bored while *waiting* for you to arrive.”

Jihoon swallowed nervously, suddenly feeling very conscious of the 3 minutes he was late for. He was only 3 minutes late! That barely counted!

“Alright, I’ll get going now okay?” Minseok chirped, cutting through the tension, “I’ll be back in a few hours.”

Minhyung’s expression softened. He bumped his shoulder gently against Minseok’s, “Don’t be gone too long okay?

“Of course, I wouldn’t let you go hungry.”

Jihoon felt like he could breathe once they were safely out of sight. He let out a sigh of relief, “What was that about?”

“Oh yeah, I told Minhyung I’d bring him takeout from the restaurant since he wanted to try their food. He was just reminding me so I don’t accidentally stay out late and leave him without dinner.”

“I meant the part where he looked like he wanted to bite my head off.”

Minseok laughed, “He just looks kind of intimidating, he wasn’t actually mad or anything. I was a bit intimidated by how tall he was when I first met him but he’s a softie once you get to know him. You might just be overthinking it.”

Jihoon was 99% sure Minhyung was definitely glaring at him, but he decided to drop it. “So how have you been? I’m sorry we weren’t able to meet up in Chengdu with our schedules.”

Minseok smiled brightly, “No worries, the schedules were pretty brutal. We’re still struggling a lot with the DDOS attacks but otherwise it’s nice to be home again.”

“What about Wooje and Sanghyeok hyung? Are they doing okay?”

“They’re also doing alright. Not resting nearly enough, but nothing out of the ordinary,” Minseok gave him a sideways glance, “Any reason you didn’t invite them today? They would’ve been happy to come along.”

“I felt kind of awkward.” Jihoon admitted, “I never really got too close to them. But I want to be. I just don’t know how. I mean, the only reason we became close is because you carried the first dozen conversations we had until I stopped being awkward. I’m not good at taking the lead with these things.”

“Wooje’s just a bit shy at first. But once he gets comfortable that kid never shuts up. He’s a real menace. And Sanghyeok hyung is just reserved. He’s also not very good at approaching people, mostly because it doesn’t cross his mind. Once you get to know him though he starts showing all his little quirks. Like his terrible dad jokes and his secret love for cuddling.”

The knowledge that Sanghyeok enjoyed cuddling really shouldn’t have stuck in Jihoon’s brain as much as it did. He barely heard anything else Minseok said through his own musings. What would it be like to cuddle with him? Would he be affectionate? Or would it be more subtle? Did he cuddle with his teammates often?

“Hyung? Are you listening?”

“Huh?” Jihoon snapped out of his thoughts to find that they were already in the restaurant, “Sorry, I was thinking about something.”

“I was just asking whether you wanted to come over after dinner.”

His heart skipped a beat.

“Come over? To your apartment? With the others?”

“You wanted to see Wooje and Sanghyeok Hyung again right?”

“I- yeah, I did.” Jihoon thanked the gods he was skilled at keeping a poker face, “You’re sure that’s okay?”

“Of course, we don’t have rules against visitors or anything. Plus the split doesn’t start for quite a while so we don’t have much on our schedules. Hmm I think I’ll take the tofu stew. Without the noodles.” Minseok sighed, “Do you think I’m getting chubby?”

“What? No. You look the same as always.”

Minseok frowned, “I feel like I’ve gained weight since Chengdu. Wooje said the same thing! You’re not lying just to spare my feelings are you?”

“Why would I do that?”

“It must be nice being tall. I’m so short I can eat dinner and it’ll look like I put on 10 pounds.”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

Minseok grinned, “Not as ridiculous as you earlier apparently. Tell me, what were you moping about that it traveled through gossip channels so fast I heard about it?”

Jihoon groaned, “What did you hear?”

“Not much actually. Geonbu hyung texted me saying you were being a pain and to take you off his hands. He also called you emotionally constipated. And Siwoo said you wanted gym tips from Hyeonjun? Oh and Peyz told me to make sure Minhyung didn’t kill you, but I’m not too sure why. He didn’t really elaborate.”

“How is it possible all three of them reached out to you already? This is so embarrassing.”

Minseok grinned, “Don’t worry, I just happen to be the center of all gossip. They’re just worried about you and want to know what’s going on.”

“I don’t even know what’s going on.” Jihoon sighed, “I’ve just been feeling agitated lately. I can’t stay off social media but every time I see certain things they put me in a bad mood.”

“You should talk to Sanghyeok hyung about that.”

His heart sped up just at the mention of that name. What was wrong with him? Keeping his neutral expression in place, he tried for a casual tone, “What about him?”

“He’s the most disconnected person I know. Especially for someone who makes a living playing games. He can probably help give you suggestions on other things that can take your mind off always having to keep up with social media. He reads a lot of books. And listens to instrumental music. And meditates. Sometimes I can’t believe he’s a real person.”

“Me neither.” Jihoon said under his breath, making sure to catalog everything Minseok told him about Sanghyeok. Maybe it would come in handy later.

“This sounds weird, but when I get stressed or overwhelmed I like to just watch or sit with Sanghyeok hyung. It makes me feel calmer. Even just watching him sit there and read gives me the feeling that everything will be okay. He’s like a rock. A rock that’ll cuddle you back if you lay on it for long enough.” Minseok smiled as he spoke. The adoring look in his eyes suddenly made Jihoon feel lonely.

“You seem really happy.”

Minseok smiled softly, “I am. I realize how rare a situation like ours is where we can stay together and lean on each other for so long. I’m really grateful to be where I am.”

They chattered about less serious things as they ate dinner. Food in Chengdu. Pandas. Complaints about the weather. Talk about their teammates. The more Jihoon learned about the other members, the more the tension in his chest eased. It seemed like Soohwan was correct about Minhyung having a crush on Minseok, but even as Minseok talked about all the different dates they went on, he seemed oblivious to the other man’s feelings. Any mention of Hyeonjun still set Jihoon’s nerves on edge, but he could count on one finger the times

Minseok mentioned Hyeonjun without also mentioning Wooje. If he already set his interests elsewhere maybe Jihoon didn't have anything to worry about after all. Although he still wasn't quite sure what he was competing with Hyeonjun for.

"Hmm, but would one order of the chicken be enough? What if Wooje is hungry too? I can't have him eating instant ramen again. Maybe I should order extra just in case. And also a stew in case Sanghyeok hasn't eaten. Maybe two, since it's gym night for Hyeonjun. He'll be hungry too. Plus extra kimchi."

"Why don't you just take the whole restaurant with you?" Jihoon teased.

Minseok pouted at him, "I'm just making sure! We usually order food together. That or we let each other know what we're eating so that we're on the same food wavelength. That's important when you live together you know. But they haven't messaged at all about it so they probably haven't eaten yet."

"No way."

"Hm?"

"You're the mom friend."

Minseok's mouth dropped open, "I am not!" he sounded offended, "Minhyung is definitely the mom friend. And Hyeonjun sometimes. But rarely. And also Sanghyeok Hyung. All of us take turns. Except Wooje. He's a baby."

"Sure, sure."

Minseok gathered the giant takeout bag in his arms, making sure that everything was secure so it didn't spill. Jihoon pondered briefly if Minhyung would be more upset if he carried the bag for Minseok or if he made Minseok carry it by himself.

"Heading up with me?" Minseok asked, pausing at the door.

"Yeah." Jihoon's neutral expression masked his sudden jump in anxiety, "Who's uh, who's home right now?"

Minseok raised an eyebrow at Jihoon as he unlocked the door and led them inside, "We play games for a living, when are we not home?"

"Minseokie~" Minhyung jumped up as soon as they walked through the door, his phone abandoned on the coffee table, "Jihoon-ssi, it was very kind of you to walk him all the way to the door. Very generous of you to go out of your way like that."

Jihoon laughed awkwardly, "Of course. I guess, uh, I'll be going now then?"

"I thought you were staying?" Minseok questioned, apparently completely unaware of the threatening aura radiating from the man behind him. Was it just Jihoon or did Minhyung get more buff recently? Maybe Jihoon really did need to start going to the gym.

“Oh, you’re staying?” Minhyung asked, the pleasant smile on his face not making him any less intimidating.

“Yeah, I invited him to hang out for a bit. He’s been stressed lately plus all his teammates are leaving to see their families over the break.” Minseok tugged on Minhyung’s sleeve and he immediately melted and followed. It felt like watching an angry grizzly bear transform into a teddy bear right before his eyes.

“I got you and Wooje chicken,” Minseok said, beginning to unpack the takeout boxes onto the table. Jihoon jumped as Wooje all but teleported into the doorway at the mention of food.

“Wahh, thank you hyung~” Wooje draped himself over Minseok with a cheeky smile.

“Get off, you’re heavy!” Minseok complained.

“Jihoon hyung? What are you doing here?” Wooje straightened up when he spotted Jihoon still standing by the door. He looked a bit embarrassed and Jihoon suddenly felt guilty for intruding on their oddly domestic atmosphere.

“Minseok invited me over.”

“Hyung, why are you just standing by the door? Come in! You can sit at the counter with me. Do you want anything to drink?” Minseok finished setting out all the food and moved into the kitchen to pull a glass out of the cupboard.

“Just water is fine.” Jihoon stepped hesitantly into the living room and instantly froze in his tracks. Sanghyeok was there. On the couch. This whole time. He was still absorbed in a book he was reading, seeming unbothered by the noise around him. Panic coursed through Jihoon’s body and he half considered turning around the bolting out the door. He wasn’t prepared for this. Why was he panicking? It wasn’t like they hadn’t spoken before.

But somehow seeing him out of uniform was different. Jihoon was suddenly struck by the fact that he was inexplicably and decidedly the *cutest* person he had ever seen. The way he was curled up on the couch and leaning against the arm rest. The fluffiness of his hair. The oversized t-shirt. The distinct curve of his lips made him look oddly cat-like. Has Jihoon ever seen Sanghyeok’s arms in his life? He was sure that man lived in his team jacket.

“Jihoon hyung?”

Jihoon swore he could see the scene before him happening in slow motion. As Minseok called his name again, Sanghyeok looked up from his book and met his gaze. A curious look. A feeling of dread settled in his stomach and before he could form a thought he turned and ran.

“Uhhhh, is he okay?” Wooje asked.

Minseok frowned, “I’m not sure. He seemed like he was feeling better earlier. Maybe inviting him over made him uncomfortable. But he said he wanted to see you and Sanghyeok hyung.”

Minhyung narrowed his eyes, gaze still trained on the open door Jihoon fled through, “It looked like he was running from Sanghyeok hyung though.” he noticed, “He was staring right at him before he ran away.”

“Really?” Sanghyeok sounded surprised, “Do you think I made him uncomfortable?”

“But you didn’t even do anything.”

Minseok hummed thoughtfully, his nose scrunched up adorably as he mulled over his thoughts. Maybe Minhyung felt just a little bit bad about pulling the intimidation act on him earlier. In his defense the whole situation was incredibly odd. Why was Jihoon randomly chatting up Minseok anyway? His gut instinct was telling him there was an ulterior motive.

“I got a weird message from Peyz earlier.” Minhyung mentioned, “Something about how Chovy was going to stop by and to go easy on him? Do you think something happened? What does that have to do with us though?”

“He messaged me too,” Minseok piped up, “He said kinda the same thing. And that he was having a hard time emotionally.”

Minhyung pouted, “Why is every adc in existence messaging you all the time?”

Right on cue Minseok reached over and squeezed his hand, the way he did every time Minhyung whined or pouted. It was worth looking immature and jealous once in a while if this was the result. It always calmed him down.

“A few of his other teammates reached out too. I guess he’s been struggling worse than he made it seem over dinner. Geonbu said he was dealing with some emotional stuff. Siwoo said he wanted to start going to the gym and thought he needed to be muscular.”

“WAIT! I got it.” Wooje grinned proudly, “Why do you think Peyz told Minhyung not to freak out on him? I bet he’s got a crush on Minseok hyung!”

Minhyung smacked Wooje gently on the back of his head, “Come on, don’t even joke about that.”

Wooje smiled unapologetically and backed away out of Minhyung’s range, “Why not? It’s a good theory! Why else is he suddenly asking him out for dinner and thinking about going to the gym?”

“By that logic he could have a crush on you too,” Minseok pointed out, “Since he seemed like he really wanted to come over and only contacted me because we happened to be closest. Maybe he was just using me to get closer to his actual target.”

Wooje scrunched up his face, “Ew, don’t even joke about that.”

“I’m just showing you how ridiculous your crush theory is. By your logic any one of us three could be the one he wanted to seek out.”

“Wait.” Minhyung suddenly felt something click in his brain, “You said he was trying to get you to bring him here? What did he say exactly?”

Minseok looked up at him curiously, “He said he wanted to get to know Wooje and Sanghyeok hyung better but wasn’t sure he was close enough with them to reach out. So I offered for him to come over and say hi.”

“Maybe Wooje’s theory isn’t so bad.”

“Huh?”

“I’m done eating, come on Minseokie I need to talk to you.” Minhyung stood up and dragged Minseok to his room. The puzzle pieces fell together in his head. It formed an odd picture, but one that wasn’t completely unrealistic.

“He wants something with Sanghyeok hyung.”

“What? Why do you think that?” Minseok tilted his head and knit his eyebrows together.

“I may have been keeping a close eye on him,” Minhyung admitted sheepishly, “Just in case. Anyways, I saw him freeze as soon as he saw Sanghyeok hyung. And then when Sanghyeok looked up Jihoon ran out the door.”

“But why would he run?”

“I don’t know.” Minhyung frowned, “Did he say anything else at dinner?”

Minseok thought for a moment, “He mentioned at dinner that he was struggling with social media use and that it was negatively impacting his mental health.”

“I got it!” Wooje’s voice piped up from outside the door.

Minseok rolled his eyes, but smiled fondly and opened the door anyway, “You were eavesdropping?”

“I was curious!” Wooje chirped, unashamed, “Okay I have a good one this time. You said he’s been on social media a lot right? And for a proplayer, what’s on social media right now? Sanghyeok hyung! Don’t you get it? He’s probably bummed out because he’s seeing one of his rivals getting praised all the time and came to seek revenge! But then he saw him in person and realized this is the real world and revenge plots are childish. It all makes sense right?”

Minhyung couldn’t help but smile at the proud expression on Wooje’s face. “Besides the last part it actually does sound kind of plausible.” Minhyung said, “I think realistically he

probably was reminded of the negative thoughts he had when he saw Sanghyeok and became overwhelmed. I don't really think he was out to enact a revenge plot on Sanghyeok hyung."

"Who wants revenge on hyung?" Hyeonjun's voice chimed in. He appeared at the doorway a second later with an alarmed expression on his face, "What did I miss? I came home to see a bunch of untouched food on the dinner table and Sanghyeok hyung frowning at his book."

"Hyung was upset? Should I go keep him company?" Wooje wondered, glancing back towards the direction of the living room, "Are we going to tell him about Jihoon's grudge against him? Or do we deal with it ourselves."

Hyeonjun narrowed his eyes, "What did you say? Chovy has a grudge against Sanghyeok hyung?"

"It's just a theory," Minhyung cut in, putting a reassuring hand on Hyeonjun's shoulder, "He came over earlier and bolted the second he saw hyung on the couch."

"He was here?" Hyeonjun looked even more agitated at the new information, "Is that why hyung was upset? Because of him?"

"Okay, okay," Minseok said in a placating tone, "Let's not jump the gun. I'll talk to Jihoon about it. Clear things up. Let's not speculate too much yet okay?"

"But my theory makes sense!" Wooje whined with a pout, "My second one at least."

"What was your first one?" Hyeonjun asked curiously.

Wooje grinned, "Come on hyung, I'll catch you up on everything. Your room?"

## Chapter 3

“I’m gonna die of embarrassment. Put me out of my misery. I need more pillows.”

Siwoo lifted the pillow off Jihoon’s face, “You don’t need more pillows. Tell me what happened?”

Jihoon grabbed his other pillow from behind his head and buried his face in it, “No.”

“You have a text.”

Jihoon groaned, “Not now.”

“It’s from Sanghyeok.”

Jihoon shot up so quickly he flung his pillow across the room, “Give me that!” he snatched the phone away from Siwoo before he could read the notification. He clutched the phone in his hand but couldn’t bring himself to look at it. He felt dizzy.

Siwoo raised an eyebrow, “Are you going to read it?”

“I’m getting to that.” Jihoon mumbled, taking deep breaths.

“Are you okay? You look like you might pass out.”

“Hyung I’m scared, what if it’s something bad? What if he’s telling me to stay away from him? Or calling me weird? What if he hates me?”

Siwoo gave him a bewildered look, “Jihoon, what exactly happened? Why would he message you that?”

“I don’t know!” Jihoon groaned, “I made a fool out of myself today. I hate him. He always makes me feel like a fool. I feel like I just proved that feeling correct with how much of an idiot I was today. Maybe I really am not good enough.”

Siwoo’s expression softened, “Jihoon, don’t say things like that. And no matter how you’re feeling about Sanghyeok right now we both know he’s too polite to ever send you a mean message. I’m really sorry you feel that way around him, I should’ve stopped you from going to see Minseok. I didn’t realize you’d run into him. Or that it would make you feel this way.”

“I feel like an idiot.”

“You’re not an idiot.”

Jihoon looked up miserably, “You don’t even know what happened yet.”

“Tell me then.” Siwoo encouraged.

“Minseok invited me over and as soon as I saw Sanghyeok hyung I ran away. Hey! Don’t laugh at me, I’m vulnerable right now.” Jihoon pouted.

“Jihoon啊, you’re so adorable.” Siwoo said between laughs, “From how you were acting I thought you punched him or something.”

“What?” Jihoon gave him an appalled look, “Why would I do that? I would never hurt him.”

“I don’t know, you’ve been harboring a lot of negative feelings towards him. Maybe it just came out in a burst of violence?” Siwoo teased.

“Very funny.”

“So, you gonna check that text then?”

Jihoon felt a rush of nervousness. It couldn't be bad right? If anything, this was a good opportunity to talk to him. An opening. Taking a deep breath, he peeked at his phone.

Sanghyeok: Are you feeling okay? I apologize if I'm overstepping, but feel free to talk to me about anything if you need to. I also apologize if I made you uncomfortable at all, feel free to let me know if that's the case as well. In my familiarity with them I sometimes forget it can be uncomfortable for younger people to have someone my age around. I apologize again, and I hope you feel better.

Despite the formal tone, Jihoon felt his heart soar as he looked at the words on the screen. It was the first time they've texted outside of a team group chat. How should he respond? If he just said he was okay, that would end the conversation. But what if he was just offered to talk out of politeness? Even so, if Jihoon was charming enough he could turn the polite offer into actual interest. He was given an opening, he had to take it.

Jihoon: Sorry about earlier, I suddenly felt unwell so I thought I'd leave. I promise it wasn't you making me uncomfortable. I'm actually quite disappointed I had to leave before I could talk to you.

Sanghyeok: Are you feeling better now? Make sure you take care of your health and don't hesitate to see a doctor. It's always better to be safe.

Jihoon: I feel fine now, I promise. I won't run out next time I come by ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ

Sanghyeok: I look forward to seeing you again then.

Jihoon cheered internally. That went well right? Or maybe he was just being polite again. It was so hard to tell over text. Either way it was still nice to see Sanghyeok worry about his health and say he was looking forward to their next meeting. Plus now that texting was on the table maybe Jihoon could invite him out sometime?

“I’m still here you know.” Siwoo said, sounding amused, “I’m guessing by that giant, dopey smile on your face that everything went well?”

Jihoon schooled his features back into his usual pokerface, “Yeah, everything’s alright.”

“So,” Siwoo ventured, “If you’re resentful towards him why is it you were smiling like a schoolgirl while texting him?”

“I never said I was resentful towards him.” Jihoon denied.

“You said, and I quote, ‘I hate him, he makes me feel like a fool’.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Jihoon defended himself, “I meant that I hate how I feel around him. Not that I actually hate him.”

His phone buzzed again, and Jihoon was disappointed to see a text from Minseok asking if he was okay. He immediately felt guilty about being disappointed, Minseok was probably worried or even offended that Jihoon ran out like that. He should've texted Minseok earlier.

Jihoon: I’m sorry about leaving so suddenly, I didn’t feel well. I’ll make it up to you okay? Want me to buy you dinner tomorrow? If it’s okay I’d also like to stop by and apologize to Wooje and Sanghyeok hyung for running out like that.’

Minseok: Sounds good ^-^ Same time as today? You can just come over and we’ll order takeout

Jihoon: It's a plan :)

"Soooo if seeing him makes you feel bad why is it you're going over again?" Siwoo asked, peeking at the texts over Jihoon's shoulder.

Jihoon blocked Siwoo's view of his phone, "I just want to go apologize!"

Siwoo gave him a concerned frown, "I don't think this is good for you. I get that it's hard to stay off social media even though I think avoiding things that upset you might be helpful. But now you're going to see him in person? Won't that just make you even more upset? I don't want to see you like that again."

"It's different," Jihoon insisted.

"How? If someone made me feel bad I'd definitely not want to see them on my screen OR in person."

"Don't you get it? Seeing him in person is the only way to make it so I don't feel bad around him any more. If I get to know him better I won't feel this weird resentment anymore. It's tiring being all bitter and jaded."

"If you're sure." Siwoo said hesitantly, "I don't want you to do something that'll make you feel worse, but I'll always be here to talk if something goes wrong."

"Thank you hyung."

~

"Should I wear this one or this one?"

Suhwan scratched his head awkwardly, “I don’t know hyung, I’m not really good at this.”

“Just wear that one sweater you like, it looks cute.” Siwoo suggested.

“I don’t want to look cute though.” Jihoon sighed, “I wanna look cool and mature.”

“Why are you dressing up to see Minseok hyung?”

“No, no, you don’t get it.” Siwoo cut in, “He’s not dressing up to impress anyone, he’s doing it to boost confidence! If he feels good about himself he’ll behave confidently. You see, whenever you’re feeling insecure, self care is critical! It’s the best way to break out of a funk.”

Soohwan nodded, looking up at Siwoo with earnest eyes.

“So how do I look?” Jihoon tucked his shirt in and looked at himself nervously. He wasn’t too sure why he was fussing over his appearance, but it felt right to put in some effort. Just so he would be prepared.

Siwoo clapped enthusiastically, “You look great! Styling like that makes your legs look so long. You are going to be late if you don’t leave now though.”

“WHAT.” Jihoon shot a panicked glance at his phone, “When did it get this late? I didn’t even have time to do my hair.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Siwoo said, shooing Jihoon out of the door, “If you style your hair it’ll look too obvious you were dressing up. This way you look effortlessly handsome.”

“You think?”

“Of course! Now go before you’re late!”

Jihoon almost sighed in relief when he made it to their dorm and saw Minseok standing outside the door by himself. At least this time he’d feel less guilty about being late.

“Hey,” he gasped, trying to catch his breath, “Sorry I’m late. Got caught up talking with the others.”

“You didn’t need to run here,” Minseok said with an amused voice, “You could’ve just texted that you’d be late?”

“I didn’t think of that.” Jihoon grumbled, trying his best to tame his now sweaty and messy hair.

“I actually wanted to talk to you about yesterday, are you feeling alright?” Minseok looked at him with an open and encouraging expression. There was something about him that simultaneously put Jihoon at ease while also giving the impression that he was hiding something. His expression betrayed nothing but concern though, and Jihoon briefly contemplated how much he should say. After all, there was probably a reason everyone was so at ease around Minseok, who was somehow the center of all gossip but still the person everyone told everything.

“I’m okay,” Jihoon said carefully, “It was rude of me to leave so suddenly. Sorry about that.”

“What happened?” Minseok asked, and Jihoon had a distinct feeling Minseok wouldn’t take evasion very lightly for this one.

“What do you think happened?” Jihoon stalled, hoping to catch a glimpse of something in Minseok’s expression that could clue him in to how he could talk his way out of this one.

Minseok pursed his lips, “I don’t know, but I’d rather hear it from you directly than speculate.”

Well that definitely wasn't good. Jihoon couldn't imagine any speculations would be worse than the truth. He hesitated, trying to decide how much to divulge, "I...I think I got overwhelmed when I saw Sanghyeok hyung. I'm not fully sure why, I just felt panicked so I ran."

Minseok seemed completely unfazed by Jihoon's answer, "Do you dislike him?"

"What? No! Of course not."

His honestly must have shone through on that response, because Minseok's expression finally softened. "Okay, do you know why you might've felt panicked then?"

"I—" Jihoon bit his lip. What was the best course of action here? He really wasn't sure he wanted to be under Minseok's piercing gaze again. For someone so small he could be oddly intimidating.

"Sometimes I feel bad when I see things about Sanghyeok hyung online," Jihoon admitted, "I guess I wasn't prepared to see him in person. But I was being genuine when I said I wanted to see him again. I don't have any ill will against him at all. It's just an immature bout of jealousy I guess."

"I'm sorry you've been dealing with all that," Minseok said with a soft smile, "I understand that feeling. You can't control how you feel and sometimes you feel guilty for having those feelings at all. I had that for a while after I lost at the world finals, even though I was ultimately still happy for my friends. It was hard to see them for a long time."

Jihoon felt the ball of nerves unravel in his chest. A feeling of relief crashed over him and he fought the urge to pick Minseok up and hug him. It felt good to be understood. And even better to be understood by one of Sanghyeok's teammates of all people. The guilt lurking inside him finally dissipated and left him feeling better than he had in weeks.

He sagged in relief, "Thank you for understanding."

“Did you still want to come up? We can just hang out in my room if you’d rather not run into anyone else.”

Jihoon grimaced, “No way, I’m not giving your boyfriend any more reasons to hate me.”

“Minhyung doesn’t hate you. And he’s not my boyfriend!” Minseok denied hotly, “Where did you get that idea?”

“Well you did just immediately assume I was talking about Minhyung when I didn’t say a name.” Jihoon teased.

Minseok crossed his arms, “That was just- that’s just because I knew that’s who you were referring to. We’re not dating. He’s just overprotective and affectionate. Besides, he’s straight so it wouldn’t be possible anyway.”

Jihoon looked at him like he was crazy, “Are you joking? He looks at you like you hung the moon. There’s no way that guy doesn’t have a massive crush on you.”

Not that Jihoon was one to judge Minseok for being oblivious. After all, he didn’t even notice the close dynamic between the two until Suhwan pointed it out to him.

“He’s just like that towards me because he gives me way too much credit for him being where he is today.” Minseok argued, “It’s not romantic or anything. He’s just really open with expressing his emotions. He good at not caring what others think and just being authentic with showing how he feels, that’s why it might look odd to other people.”

“Sure.” Jihoon said, unconvinced.

“Anyways. You still feeling alright? I won’t be offended if you’d prefer to leave.” Minseok paused at the door and turned to scan Jihoon’s expression.

“I’m fine.” Jihoon said with a smile that hopefully masked all his nervousness. What if Sanghyeok was sitting on the couch again? What if he was in casual clothing again? Idiot, of course he’d be in casual clothes in his own home. Yet somehow it seemed almost scandalous to see him in short sleeves.

“I’m back!” Minseok greeted as he walked through the door. Right on cue, Minhyung appeared from down the hall. He gave Minseok an imploring look and Minseok shook his head. Minhyung frowned and glanced at Jihoon and back to Minseok. Minseok shook his head again and Minhyung turned to head back to his room, but not without another suspicious glance towards Jihoon.

Jihoon subconsciously moved to stand behind Minseok as they walked into the living room, “What was that about?”

Minseok waved him off, “It was nothing. Wanna order food?”

Jihoon passed Minseok his phone, “You can order whatever you want. Enough for everyone else too. That was definitely not nothing though. Minhyung gave me a weird look.”

Minseok gave him a weary smile, “Let’s just say some pretty crazy speculations flew around after you left yesterday. Minhyung was just checking in since I said I’d talk to you about it to make sure no one made any incorrect assumptions.”

Jihoon groaned, “How bad was it?”

Minseok laughed, “You know kids and their wild imaginations. Wooje was saying some pretty absurd things.”

“I was not!”

Minseok jumped at the sound of Wooje's voice, "When did you get here?"

Wooje grinned, "Just now. We're ordering food? Can I get chicken again? Oooh, can we get Sanghyeok hyung's chicken brand?"

"Sanghyeok hyung has a chicken brand?" Jihoon asked in surprise.

"He did an ad for a chicken brand," Minseok corrected, "I think we can get it delivered, Minhyung did say it was pretty good."

"I didn't see the ad." Jihoon said with a frown. He thought for sure he was always caught up with everything that happened.

Wooje shrugged, "I mean, it's not super related to esports so it probably didn't show up. Here, I'll pull it up on my phone."

Minseok shot Jihoon a concerned glance, "Why don't we just order food first?"

"No, I wanna see it," Jihoon insisted, somehow the knowledge that he missed out on a part of Sanghyeok's life made him irrationally irritated. How was he supposed to exist if seeing posts about Sanghyeok made him feel bad but being left out made him feel worse? There was no escape.

"Wow~ Look at hyung's acting. He's a natural." Wooje commented as the video played.

"Yeah." Jihoon said, feeling kind of dazed as he watched Sanghyeok lick his fingers. "The, uh, the chicken. The chicken looks good."

"Want to get some?"

“Huh?”

“The chicken?” Minseok prompted, “Do we want to order chicken?”

“Oh. Yeah,” Jihoon laughed sheepishly, “Sorry, I was distracted.”

“It looked like it.” Minhyung’s voice made Jihoon jump. Minhyung was watching him from where he stood at the entrance to the hallway, but oddly enough his expression was one of light curiosity instead of the usual scrutiny. He looked slightly surprised, like he had just realized something, “I told Sanghyeok hyung we were ordering dinner. He’ll be out to join us soon.”

With Minhyung still watching him, Jihoon fought to keep his expression even at the mention of Sanghyeok. The target of his confusing and sometimes conflicting feelings. If he felt bad about himself whenever he saw the other man, why did he feel so excited now? He barely had a chance to process his own thoughts before Sanghyeok walked into the room. He had a book tucked under his arm and looked tired. The weariness shifted into a polite smile as soon as he saw Jihoon.

“Jihoon啊, how are you doing?”

“I’m doing okay.” Jihoon said in a thankfully normal voice, “What about you?”

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Minhyung approach Minseok and bend over to whisper something in his ear. Minseok’s eyes widened and he immediately snapped his gaze over to Jihoon, who felt his anxiety spike. What did Minhyung say to him?

A hand on his shoulder startled him out of his thoughts.

“Are you okay?”

Jihoon froze in place, barely comprehending his suddenly close proximity with Sanghyeok. His hand rested lightly on Jihoon's shoulder as he leaned in with a concerned expression on his face. Jihoon didn't think they had ever been this close to each other before. He stared blankly at Sanghyeok's face, completely forgetting that he was asked a question. He was suddenly struck by the fact that Sanghyeok was shorter than him by a not insignificant amount. It did odd things to his heart.

"Jihoon? Can you hear me?" Panic set in properly when one of Sanghyeok's hands moved to his neck to check his pulse, the other brushing against his lips as he checked for breathing. What did Jihoon get himself into? He was never going to live this down. Maybe he should pretend to faint? Although with Sanghyeok's fingers pressed against his neck maybe he'd feel lightheaded enough to actually faint.

"Should we call for help?"

"No!" Jihoon snapped out of his daze, "I'm fine. Really. What were you saying? I spaced out a bit."

"That looked like a bit more than spacing out," Minhyung said, "Why don't you come sit down in the guest room for a bit? Maybe it'll help you calm down."

The way Minhyung said it left no room for argument, and Jihoon decided not to fight it.

Sanghyeok frowned at him, "Yes, maybe lying down would be good. His pulse was rapid and his breathing was shallow."

"We'll call you out when the food is here!" Minseok chirped, shooting Minhyung an imploring look, "Feel free to come get me if you want to talk about anything."

"I think I got this." Minhyung said with a cheery grin that didn't inspire confidence.

Swallowing nervously, Jihoon followed Minhyung into their spare bedroom. He didn't look upset, and his demeanor had softened a lot since they first met. Then why did he feel so nervous?

As soon as they were alone Minhyung closed the door and turned to him with an accusatory look, "You have a crush on Sanghyeok hyung!"

"Excuse me?" Jihoon stammered, his jaw dropping. What the heck was he saying?

Minhyung groaned, "You can't be serious. You don't know? You're even worse than Hyeonjun."

"What are you talking about?"

Minhyung pinched the bridge of his nose, "How is it possible you haven't realized you have a crush? Even Hyeonjun was half aware and just in denial."

"I don't have a crush on him!" Jihoon denied, "What made you think that?"

"I don't know, maybe the fact that you perked up as soon as I said his name? Plus the way you short circuited when he touched you." Minhyung listed, "I can keep going if you want, but I don't think you want to be reminded of yesterday."

Jihoon grimaced, "What does that have to do with anything?"

Minhyung looked amused, "You're not the first person I've seen panic and run when they run into their crush unexpectedly. Look, you're also not the first person I've talked to that is really out of touch with their feelings. When I first started in this career I didn't realize it would be such an anomaly that I had dating experience in the past."

"I was busy." Jihoon mumbled, feeling kind of embarrassed.

“I’m not judging you.” Minhyung said kindly, his tone the friendliest it’s been since they first met, “I just thought you should know. It’ll help you process your feelings better if you understand them. Minseok did tell me what you told him earlier-”

“When?” Jihoon asked, bewildered, “When did you even have time for that?”

“He texted us under the table.”

“Us?”

“Me and Wooje,” Minhyung said with a shrug, “Wooje had some wild theories yesterday so we thought it was best things were cleared up as soon as possible. He didn’t say anything besides the fact that you were feeling a bit envious of Sanghyeok hyung so don’t worry. He didn’t include any personal details.”

“Oh. And you’re...okay with that?”

Minhyung snorted, “Well obviously not. If you were really bitter to the point where you’d run if you saw him I wouldn’t let you within 10 feet of him. He was really upset when he realized you ran out because of him.”

Jihoon drooped, “Oh.”

“However, I think that whole ‘jealous of him’ thing is bullshit.” Minhyung said bluntly, “So I’m completely fine if you stick around while you work out what your feelings actually are. However, don’t you dare initiate anything before you’re sure of your feelings or I’ll do something I might regret.”

Jihoon’s eyes widened, “Why am I getting the shovel talk when I don’t even know if I have a crush on him yet?”

Minhyung smiled cheerily, “Insurance. Our other members are a bit confrontation adverse so it’s up to me. Hyeonjun can and will glare and flex at you from a distance though. And Minseokie will find other ways to make you sorry. I think compared to that a verbal warning is pretty tame.”

“I see,” Jihoon gulped, “I would never do anything to hurt him. With or without a crush. How do I....how do I know if I have a crush?”

Minhyung’s expression softened, “Well, the easiest part is the physical aspect. Do you find him attractive?”

“Everyone does.” Jihoon said, feeling defensive, “That doesn’t mean anything.”

“I can tell he’s handsome but that doesn’t mean I’m attracted to him. There’s a difference.”

“How do I tell?” Jihoon asked, embarrassed.

“Well, for me at least, it meant that I really liked looking at them. I liked watching them and noticing the little things about them. It wasn’t just ‘that person is cute’ it was more specific. I like how they smile. I like how soft their cheeks look. I think the little mole under their eye is pretty. You start to notice their mannerisms and start liking those too. That’s when it starts going from just thinking they’re cute to becoming actual interest.”

“It’s confusing.”

Minhyung smiled sympathetically, “Feelings are confusing a lot of the time. Just think about why you feel something when you feel it and it’ll help you process those feelings. Come on, let’s go join them before they get too worried.”

Jihoon was dreading going back out there. What excuse could he have for himself this time? Why was he always embarrassing himself in front of Sanghyeok? And what about Sanghyeok made him feel so self conscious all the time?

“Jihoonie!” Minseok greeted him with a smile, “I’m glad you’re feeling better. I hope it’s okay that I told everyone about the dizzy spells you’ve been having. They were all worried. We have some iron pills in the cabinet if you want me to get them for you?”

Relief washed over him and he internally thanked Minseok for bailing him out.

“No need, I feel better now.”

“You should still take one just in case.” Sanghyeok spoke up, putting Jihoon on edge again, “Have you spoken to a doctor about the dizziness?”

“Um, yeah,” Jihoon lied, glad he had practice schooling his expression, “It’s just issues with low blood sugar. Probably worse today since I didn’t eat much and then ran here.”

“Good thing the food just arrived then.” Minseok said, “Wooje, go down and get it.”

“But I’m comfortable here.” Wooje pouted, sinking lower into the couch.

“I’ll get it.” Sanghyeok offered, “Don’t worry.”

“Thanks hyung!” Wooje said with a shameless smile.

Minseok rolled his eyes, “I swear we spoil that kid too much.”

Minhyung nudged him affectionately, “You say that like you don’t spoil him the most. When was the last time he bought his own food?”

“Food doesn’t count, he needs to eat well if he’s going to be healthy!”

Minhyung looked at Minseok with such intense adoration that Jihoon looked away. Once again, it felt like he was intruding on this oddly domestic life they had. The familiarity they had with each other was something Jihoon began to envy.

“Wooje, when is Hyeonjun coming back from the gym?” Minhyung called from the kitchen as he fetched five glasses of water and a coke zero.

“6pm,” Wooje answered absently, still absorbed with whatever he was browsing on his phone, “6:15 if he decides to do cardio.”

“Well tell him to hurry if he doesn’t want his food to be cold.”

Jihoon perked up when he saw the door open and Sanghyeok walk in with the takeout bag. “Food’s here.”

Sanghyeok set the bag on the table, “You kids eat first, I’ll eat when Hyeonjun gets back. He doesn’t like eating alone.”

Jihoon couldn’t help but feel a twinge of jealousy. What made Hyeonjun so special that Sanghyeok would wait specifically for him before eating? He stabbed a piece of chicken aggressively. Why did he care so much anyway? Who cares if Sanghyeok was waiting for Hyeonjun to get back so they could eat together? He was just doing it because of his older brother instinct, not like it was a romantic thing.

He paused, almost dropping his chopsticks. He was jealous. What reason did he have to be jealous? There had to be something wrong with him. There was no way Minhyung was right about him having a crush. That was ridiculous. He glanced over at Sanghyeok, who had

gone back to reading on the couch. Was he attracted to him? He was handsome, sure, but that was obvious to anyone with eyes. He was kind of pretty, the way he looked when he was relaxed on the couch without the serious expression he used during interviews. He was cute too, when he smiled in a way that reached his eyes. Jihoon liked that smile. He hoped that Sanghyeok would smile at him like that someday.

“I can’t just leave Jihoon out here by himself,” Minseok said with a laugh. The sound of Jihoon’s name pulled him out of his thoughts, “Why don’t you play by yourself for a little? We can play arena later tonight.”

“No, it’s okay. I don’t mind.” Jihoon said quickly, “I eat slowly so it would be even more awkward if you all sat here and I was the only one eating.”

“Are you sure?”

“He was busy anyway.” Wooje muttered under his breath, fixing Jihoon with an unreadable look. Despite the absence of ire in his gaze it was still oddly unnerving. Jihoon flushed, he must’ve been caught staring.

“What was that?” Minseok asked.

“I was just saying that Hyeonjun would be back soon.” Wooje said with an innocent smile, “That’s all.”

Minseok shrugged, not questioning it, “Alright. Jihoon hyung, you can hang out here for as long as you want. Your teammates all left for vacation already right? My room’s the second one down the hall, come get me when you’re done eating.”

Jihoon nodded gratefully. He really didn’t want to go back to sit alone in his room. The atmosphere in their dorm seemed so lively and warm, he wanted to stay a bit longer. It was nice. A sideways glance told him that Wooje was now absorbed in his phone again, furiously typing something. Taking that as his chance, Jihoon turned his gaze back towards Sanghyeok. He was curled up comfortably on the couch again, completely focused on his book. Even just looking at him made Jihoon feel more at ease. Maybe he should get into reading.

Maybe he could ask Sanghyeok for book recommendations? It would be another excuse to talk to him. Not that he was only starting to read because he wanted to get closer to him. It just sounded like a relaxing hobby. His good mood vanished when he saw Hyeonjun walk through the door. Sanghyeok looked up at the sound of the door opening and smiled at Hyeonjun in a way that made Jihoon's stomach churn. He was wearing a tank top with his jacket draped around his shoulders. He was all angles and muscle. Jihoon suddenly felt tragically inadequate.

Hyeonjun tossed his jacket onto the couch and flopped down right next to Sanghyeok. His arm was slung over the back of the couch, not quite around Sanghyeok's shoulders but close enough to make Jihoon bristle. Jihoon was taken aback when Hyeonjun glanced over at him with an almost challenging expression.

Sanghyeok seemed unbothered by the proximity, "Are you not hungry? Jihoon ordered chicken for everyone."

Hyeonjun didn't break eye contact, still staring right at Jihoon, "I know, Wooje told me everything." The words were deliberate and almost threatening. What the hell did Wooje tell him?

Jihoon suddenly wished Minseok would come back.

"Do you want me to heat up the leftovers for you? Wooje saved you your favorite kind."

Hyeonjun hopped off the couch, "I can do it. Are you cold hyung? You should take my jacket. The heating is still broken."

"I feel fine," Sanghyeok said, but didn't protest when Hyeonjun draped his jacket around his shoulders. Jihoon ground his teeth together at the sight of "Oner" in bold letters plastered across the jacket Sanghyeok was now wearing. He thought for sure from how Minseok talked about them that Hyeonjun and Wooje were together and he'd have nothing to worry about. Although apparently Wooje was the one that clued Hyeonjun into what was happening. Maybe they were in on it together?

Sanghyeok sat down next to Jihoon, “How are you feeling?”

“I feel better.” Jihoon said in an unconvincing tone. The oversized jacket hung off Sanghyeok's shoulders and the sleeves pooled around his hands. Jihoon wondered briefly if his jacket would look like that on Sanghyeok. He and Hyeonjun probably wore similar sizes. His heart skipped a beat at the thought. How would Sanghyeok look in a Gen G jacket with Jihoon's name printed across the back? He would pay to see that one.

“How did you like the chicken?”

“It's the brand you're sponsored by right hyung? Of course I liked it.” Jihoon said. He cheered internally when Sanghyeok smiled in response. Not quite as reserved as his usual polite smile but not quite reaching the warmth of the smiles he gave his teammates. Jihoon would take it as a victory anyway. His brief moment of lightness was overshadowed when Hyeonjun joined them at the table, sitting close enough to Sanghyeok that their shoulders touched.

“You're not cold?” Sanghyeok asked Hyeonjun in a concerned tone, “I can get my own jacket you know.”

Hyeonjun shrugged, “Nah, I'm still running hot from my workout. I hit a new pr today.”

“Congratulations,” Sanghyeok praised him, making Hyeonjun's eyes light up, “Make sure you don't hurt yourself though, okay? Wooje said you almost hurt yourself the other day.”

Hyeonjun turned to Wooje with a betrayed expression, “I can't believe you told on me to Sanghyeok hyung! I thought we were keeping that a secret!”

Wooje smiled playfully, “Oops.”

“Brat, next time you can queue alone.”

“You say that every time.” Wooje said, unbothered, “So, we playing today?”

“After I eat.” Hyeonjun grumbled, giving in immediately.

“When do you have to get back Jihoon?” Sanghyeok asked, “I’ll call you a cab before you leave. It’s not safe to walk back in the dark.”

“I don’t know when I’m leaving yet, I don’t want to intrude.”

“You aren’t intruding,” Sanghyeok reassured him, “You can stay as long as you want. You don’t have a schedule for another few weeks right?”

Jihoon nodded.

“Are you going home over the break?”

“No, I’m staying. Everyone but Geonbu left for home already though. He’s usually out with his boyfriend so I have the dorm to myself most days.”

Sanghyeok smiled, “I heard Geonbu and Heosu finally started dating. I’m happy for them. They seem really happy too.”

“I’d be happier if his room wasn’t right next to mine.” Jihoon groused.

Sanghyeok let out a started laugh, eyes widening slightly and his ears turning red. Jihoon felt himself flush when he realized how it must’ve sounded.

“Not like that!” Jihoon rushed out, “I just meant that they talk a lot and it’s loud. And mushy. Not, um, the other thing. Oh god. I hope I never have to listen to that.”

“I-” Sanghyeok looked at a loss for words. He really was adorable when he was flustered. Jihoon had never seen this side of him before. He couldn’t help but laugh at the sight of the usually composed man frozen like a deer in headlights.

“I didn’t realize what it was implying until I said it,” Jihoon laughed, “Sorry hyung. I didn’t mean to put that mental image in your head.”

“I’m gonna need an apology for that one too,” Hyeonjun said, face scrunched up in disgust.

“At least your room isn’t in between Minseok’s and Minhyung’s,” Wooje complained, “The day those two work it out I’m going to need heavy duty earplugs.”

Sanghyeok cleared his throat awkwardly, the blush spreading across his cheeks, “I think I’m done eating. Do you want me to do the dishes?”

Hyeonjun threw his head back in a cackle, “You’re such a prude hyung. Cute~”

Sanghyeok shook his head with a laugh, “I’m too old to be called that.”

“That’s not true,” Jihoon blurted, “I think you’re- I mean, I think people can be cute at any age.”

“Is that so.” Minseok’s amused voice said from behind them.

“It’s just a fact. You know. Can’t make generalizations and all.” Jihoon mumbled, “Anyway, I thought you two were playing league?”

Minhyung nodded in Hyeonjun's direction, "We heard him come back, we've got an even number so I thought it would be fun to queue together. Since now Jihoon can be Sanghyeok's partner."

Jihoon stood up so fast he almost knocked his chair over.

"Oh, uh, I actually have to, um, go. Now." He cringed at his own panic, but there was no backing out now. He was such a coward. "I, um, got a text from Geonbu. So I have to go now. It's an emergency. But thanks for having me!"

Minseok crossed his arms and pouted at Minhyung as they watch Jihoon flee out of the door, "See, I told you it would scare him off!"

"Scare him off?" Sanghyeok asked, confused, "Is he okay?"

"Uhhh," Minseok and Minhyung exchanged a glance, "He's just, you know, introverted. I thought a large group would be too overwhelming. But Minhyungie didn't want to risk making him feel left out either."

Minhyung just smiled and nodded, not risking giving them away when he was terrible at lying.

"I told him I would call a cab for him when he left," Sanghyeok said with a frown, "It's getting dark out. I'll just go check on him okay?"

"Yes hyung."

As soon as Sanghyeok was out of sight Minseok turned to Minhyung with a sulky expression, "You almost gave us away."

Minhyung hung his head like a scolded puppy, “How was I supposed to know he would straight up run out of here?”

“It looked like they were making progress in conversing normally before we interrupted too.” Minseok sighed, “I think after that I believe in your theory though. It does explain a lot.”

“Uhh, can you two explain what’s going on?” Wooje asked, “You’ve been acting weird.”

“Why the hell is that guy here again?” Hyeonjun cut in, “Wooje told me he had some jealous streak against Sanghyeok hyung. And that he kept staring at hyung with this creepy blank expression as soon as he got here.”

“Jihoon’s harmless. He doesn’t have any bad intentions.”

“Harmless in a literal sense maybe, but did you see how bothered Sanghyeok hyung was when we realized that guy ran out because of him?” Hyeonjun pointed out, “And now it’ll happen again because he did the exact same thing again! Why are we inviting him around?”

“We got it all wrong actually. He’s not actually jealous, he just has a crush.” Minhyung told them, making both Wooje and Hyeonjun’s mouths drop open in shock.

“That’s even worse!” Hyeonjun growled, “That’s just admitting he has bad intentions!”

Minhyung laughed, throwing his arm around the fuming Hyeonjun, “Having a crush means bad intentions huh? What makes you think that?”

Hyeonjun snuck a glance at Wooje, ears turning red, “You know how men are! Their heads are filled with terrible thoughts.”

“Come on, Hyeonjun. I think hyung can fend for himself. Besides, it’s still just harmless puppy love. It’s kind of endearing.”

Hyeonjun huffed, “Why are you on his side now? You were ready to tear his throat out yesterday when you thought he had a crush on Minseok.”

Minhyung leaned closer and lowered his voice, ignoring curious looks from Minseok and Wooje, “If things end up working out for us, wouldn’t it be nice if Sanghyeok hyung had company too? I don’t want him to be alone all the time. We could go on triple dates even.”

“Yeah but why does it have to be that guy?” Hyeonjun said reluctantly, “Can’t it be someone less physically imposing and someone hyung could beat up in the hypothetical situation that he would need to?”

Minhyung laughed, “You’re too paranoid. Besides, it’s not like we can just choose some person we approve of, in the end it’s Sanghyeok hyung’s choice.”

“Plus two out of five of us can beat him up if it comes to that.” Wooje piped up.

Minseok flicked him on the forehead, “No one’s beating anyone up. We’re all jumping the gun here, we don’t even know how much of a crush it is. Who knows, it could go away in a week.”

Hyeonjun looked doubtful, “Maybe.”

“For now let’s just see how things play out. If anything looks off, then we intervene. Okay?” Minhyung said placatingly.

“Fine.”

~

Jihoon: Someone kill me.

Siwoo: ???

Siwoo: What happened

Siwoo: Spill

Siwoo: Weren't you going over to Minseok's today?

Jihoon: I'm gonna die of embarrassment. Geonbu, if anyone asks you, you had an emergency and I had to come home.

Geonbu: ?

“Jihoon?”

The sound of Sanghyeok's voice startled Jihoon from his thoughts. He cursed inwardly, he should've walked further out from the building before stopping to vent his thoughts.

“Sanghyeok hyung, what are you doing out here?” Jihoon greeted, trying to act casual.

“It's dark out, you shouldn't be walking back. I said I would call a cab for you, remember?” Sanghyeok glanced briefly at the phone in Jihoon's hands, “Is everything okay? It seemed very sudden.”

“Yeahh.” Jihoon said, stalling for time as he thought of an excuse. At least Sanghyeok didn't seem to have caught on to the fact that he was lying. No doubt Minseok already knew. “Just

an issue with the....plumbing? I thought I should get back before any of our carpeting was too badly damaged.”

“That sounds unfortunate, I hope it isn’t too bad. You know how to fix the plumbing?”

“Just the issue that happens a lot in our kitchen,” Jihoon lied, hoping it sounded plausible, “I’m used to fixing it.”

“I see.” Sanghyeok said, thankfully not looking suspicious at all. A gust of wind blew past, and Jihoon felt a twinge of annoyance as Sanghyeok pulled Hyeonjun’s jacket tighter around himself.

“You should head back in if you’re cold.”

He shook his head, “It’s okay, the cab will be here soon anyway. I just want to make sure you get back safe.”

Jihoon couldn’t help but smile, “Thanks hyung. I’m sorry I’m leaving so soon again.”

Sanghyeok returned the smile, “Don’t apologize. It must be a burden for you to come all this way to see Minseok.”

“Not at all, plus it means I get to see you too. You and Wooje I mean. Both of you.” Jihoon corrected quickly, “It’s nice.”

“You’re always welcome.” Sanghyeok said genuinely. There was a warmth in his expression that was beginning to lean into familiarity. A sort of giddy joy bloomed in Jihoon’s chest, this was progress right? Maybe it wasn’t so bad that he panicked and ran out again.

His brief spot of joy was quickly snuffed when Sanghyeok huddled further into Hyeonjun’s jacket, burying his nose under the collar to block his face from the wind. The street lamp lit

up the bold white letters spelling out another man's name like a taunt.

"Hyung, take my jacket if you're cold." Jihoon blurted out, the itch of irritation overriding his nervousness, "It's warmer than that one."

There was an amused glint to Sanghyeok's eyes when he glanced back at Jihoon, "I can stand in the cold for a few more minutes. You remind me of Hyeonjun you know, always fretting about my health. I'm not quite that old yet."

Jihoon clenched his jaw at the comparison, the sight of Hyeonjun's stage name stamped across Sanghyeok's back burning into his brain. Without thinking, he took off his jacket and draped it over Sanghyeok's shoulders.

"Take it anyway." Jihoon mumbled. Heat rushed to his face as the sudden bravado passed and he realized what he did.

"I don't need it, you're going to catch a cold—"

"You let Hyeonjun give you his jacket." Jihoon interrupted, sounding a lot more sulky than he was hoping to.

Sanghyeok blinked in surprise, tilting his head slightly like seeing Jihoon at a 45 degree angle would help him understand better. Jihoon cursed the fact that he found that tiny action gut wrenchingly adorable. Luckily, at that moment the cab pulled over. Resisting the urge to audibly sigh in relief, Jihoon turned to Sanghyeok with a bright smile, "I'll see you later hyung. Good night."

Sanghyeok looked good in Jihoon's jacket.

## Chapter 4

Jihoon: Hey, I think I left my jacket at your place. Can I come pick it up sometime today? I can pick up food on the way.

Minseok: “left your jacket at my place”

Minseok: Is that what we’re calling it

Jihoon: How does bulgogi sound?

Jihoon: :)

Minseok: ....

Minseok: With pickled radishes

“Jihoon’s coming over.” Minseok announced, looking up at Minhyung from where his head was resting in Minhyung’s lap.

“Does that mean we have to move?” Minhyung sighed, “But I’m comfortable.”

“Your leg isn’t numb?”

“Nope. You’re light as a feather.”

“Liar.”

Minhyung smiled, full of sincerity and adoration, “I’d never lie to you.”

Minseok hid his face in Minhyung’s shirt. How did he say stuff like that without batting an eye? Sometime’s Minseok couldn’t believe he was a real person.

“So, what did he say about the fact that Sanghyeok hyung came in wearing Jihoon’s jacket yesterday?”

Minseok sat up, “He said he ‘left his jacket’ at our place! Can you believe him? How did he go from running away at the sight of Sanghyeok hyung to giving him his jacket like he’s in some romance novel?”

Minhyung shrugged, “You’d be surprised how motivating jealousy can be.”

“Jealousy?”

Minhyung raised an eyebrow, “Did you not notice? I could practically see veins popping out of Jihoon’s forehead when Hyeonjun gave Sanghyeok hyung his jacket. And a jacket with Hyeonjun’s name on it? That’s bound to get a reaction.”

Minseok looked confused, “Why?”

Minhyung laughed and ruffled his hair, “Might be a weird male ego thing. Marking your territory and all that. Like how Hyeonjun hates when I borrow his clothes but looks all smug whenever Wooje wears anything of his. Especially in public. I’m 100% sure Hyeonjun gave hyung his jacket to piss Jihoon off. And then Jihoon did it back to say that he’s not backing down.”

Minseok snorted, “You guys are weird.”

Minhyung poked Minseok's cheek playfully, "Come on, you say that like you and Wooje don't do the same thing."

"We don't!"

"Not with clothing of course." Minhyung laughed, "But you guys assert your dominance by bossing us around in front of others to show them how much influence you have on us. Wooje does it so often the entire world knows Hyeonjun's got a soft spot for him."

"Well we don't do that purposefully," Minseok huffed.

Minhyung smiled fondly, "Maybe you don't, but Wooje definitely does. He even does it with you! He'll get you to buy him something by acting cute and then stick his tongue out at me like 'Ha! He spoils me but not you'."

Minseok giggled, "Wooje did that?"

"And I can't even be bad at him because he's cute!" Minhyung complained.

"Oh!" Minseok glanced at his phone, "Jihoon's here."

"I'll go get him." Minhyung offered, "I'll be back before you know it."

Minseok sat back, looking amused, "Go easy on him."

~

Jihoon rocked back and forth on his feet, carrying his bag full of take out boxes. He decided to get enough for everyone again, just in case. He wondered if Sanghyeok would be in the

living room reading again. How should Jihoon greet him this time? Maybe he should practice?

“Hey.”

Jihoon froze when he saw Minhyung walk out of the door. He was fully expecting it to be Minseok greeting him. If Minseok sent Minhyung it couldn’t be good right? Or maybe it meant Minhyung was warming up to him?

“Hey, Minhyung.” He greeted politely, “Is Minseok not feeling well?”

“He looked comfortable so I didn’t want him to get up,” Minhyung said, “Plus it means I get to ask you about what we talked about yesterday.”

“Yesterday?”

Minhyung rolled his eyes, “Have you come to terms with your very obvious crush on Sanghyeok hyung yet?”

“I don’t- How are you still so sure it’s a crush?”

“He came in wearing your jacket yesterday.” Minhyung pointed out.

“Yeah well he was also wearing Hyeonjun’s jacket, and it’s not like Hyeonjun has a crush on Sanghyeok.” Jihoon paused, “Does he? He doesn’t right?”

Minhyung gave him an amused look, “Don’t worry, he definitely doesn’t. He’s just protective.”

“Oh,” Jihoon breathed a sigh of relief, “That’s good.”

“Yeah? And why is that good?”

Jihoon flushed, “I just meant that him being protective is good. Not the other thing. That’s none of my business.”

“Sure. So if you came in to see hyung still wearing Hyeonjun’s jacket you wouldn’t be upset?”

Jihoon bristled, but kept his expression neutral, “Why would he be doing that? He has his own clothing.”

Minhyung glanced over Jihoon’s clothing, “Did you wear your team jacket today on the off chance you’d get to see Sanghyeok hyung wear it? I think it’ll really put you on Hyeonjun’s bad side if you make him wear that. Can’t say I’d be thrilled to see it either.”

“I didn’t!” Jihoon insisted, face turning even more red, “I’m texting Minseok to come get me.”

“Fine, fine, let’s go inside.” Minhyung relented, “You’ll figure it out eventually.”

Jihoon felt anticipation build as they headed up to their dorms. Is this really what it felt like to have a crush? It was simultaneously terrible and exciting. Nothing like the rosy softness of romance in webtoons or the tumultuous woe of romance in kdramas. It felt more like a sprig of ivy that he forgot about and somehow grew into every crevice of his brain.

“Jihoon!” Minseok greeted, “What took you guys so long?”

Jihoon placed the food on the table and flopped down next to Minseok, “Why don’t you ask your boyfriend?”

Not even bothering to acknowledge the boyfriend comment, Minseok sent Minhyung a curious look. Minhyung gave an innocent smile and sat on Minseok's other side, "Just lost track of time chatting. You know how it is."

"I got enough food for everyone," Jihoon said, "If they're around."

"Sanghyeok hyung is home yes."

"I wasn't asking specifically about him!"

"So I shouldn't tell him you arrived?" Minseok teased.

"You two are terrible." Jihoon huffed.

"Are you looking for Sanghyeok hyung?" Wooje asked as he walked in to join them, "I think he's in Hyeonjun's room." He paused as he spotted the takeout bag on the table, "Oh, did you bring enough for all of us? We thought you and Minseok were going out for food. We actually just placed a delivery order."

"What? How come you didn't tell me?" Minhyung asked.

Wooje shrugged sheepishly, "Minseok hyung always brings you food when he goes out. I kinda thought you wouldn't need anything. But hey, it worked out right? Extra food is better than a shortage."

"Wooje!" Hyeonjun's voice shouted from down the hall, "The food's here, go get it!"

"You get it!" Wooje shouted back.

The door down the hall opened, and Jihoon could hear Sanghyeok talking, “It’s fine Hyeonjun, I can go down and get it.”

“That’s just gonna make Wooje more and more lazy.” Hyeonjun’s voice complained.

They paused in surprise when they walked into the living room to see Jihoon there. Sanghyeok’s expression quickly morphed into a small smile while Hyeonjun’s hardened into a cold stare.

“Jihoon啊, I didn’t know you’d be here so soon.” Sanghyeok greeted.

“I couldn’t wait to get here I guess.” Jihoon said with a smile.

“It must be difficult suddenly being all by yourself in the dorms,” Sanghyeok sympathized, “Especially after getting used to all the company.”

“Yes. Of course. Because that’s the reason I was excited to be here.” Jihoon agreed.

“Smooth.” Minseok muttered under his breath. Jihoon elbowed him.

“You arrived just in time to join us for dinner,” Sanghyeok said, “I’ll be right back after to go fetch our food.”

“I’ll come with you,” Hyeonjun offered, quickly following Sanghyeok out the door. Jihoon’s eye twitched when he saw Hyeonjun sling his arm over Sanghyeok’s shoulders right as the door closed and blocked his view. Why did they need two people to pick up a delivery bag anyway?

Minseok nudged Wooje, “Go set the table. You don’t have Hyeonjun or Sanghyeok hyung to cover for you this time.”

Wooje whined in protest but got up anyway, leaving Jihoon in Minseok and Minhyung’s clutches.

“So,” Minseok said in a conversational tone, “Any revelations since we last spoke?”

“Nope.” Jihoon said stubbornly, poker face not wavering, “Just a boring day. Played a lot of games. Not much else.”

Minseok pouted and Minhyung put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, “Let me try. Hyung looked really good in Hyeonjun’s sweater didn’t he?”

Jihoon felt his eye twitch, but his calm expression stayed in place, “Looked like a generic sweater to me. How do you know it’s his?”

“He was wearing it in that one live stream right after he bleached his hair,” Minhyung recalled easily, “Plus Sanghyeok hyung doesn’t own anything with sleeves that go over his hands. It would impair his movement when playing. It’s a shame, he looks so cute with sweater paws.”

Jihoon grunted, finding it harder and harder to hide his irritation, “What the heck is a sweater paw?”

“When sweaters have long sleeves that go over someone’s hands. It’s adorable. Fans love that kind of thing too. If I posted a photo of hyung in that sweater they’d lose their minds.”

“Why would you do that?” Jihoon said, irritation finally showing, “People are gonna get weird ideas if they see him wearing Hyeonjun’s clothing.”

“They’ll think it’s cute.”

“They’ll freak out and it’s all I’ll see online for days.” Jihoon grumbled.

“We’re back!” Hyeonjun’s voice interrupted them as they walked back into the room. He was carrying the food in one hand and with his other arm still around Sanghyeok hyung’s shoulders. Jihoon was suddenly aware of how large that sweater looked. If he didn’t know it was Hyeonjoon’s Jihoon probably would’ve found it cute.

Sanghyeok frowned at the spread on the table, “Oh, I didn’t realize you brought this much food. I should have checked before we ordered.”

“It’s okay hyung, it just means you’ll have enough for lunch tomorrow.” Jihoon confidently took the seat right next to Sanghyeok, eyeing Hyeonjun as he claimed the seat on his other side.

“Yeah, it’s lucky bulgogi holds up well when reheated.” Hyeonjun said.

Jihoon wasn’t sure if it was purposeful, but the assumption that the food he brought would be ignored until tomorrow irritated him. In his irritation, he picked up a tray of his food and set it in front of Sanghyeok, right next to the kimchi stew Hyeonjun ordered him.

He smiled sweetly, “Try it hyung, it’s from my favorite restaurant.”

“You shouldn’t eat too much or you won’t have room for your dinner,” Hyeonjun cut in, “You know it’s tricky to heat stew in the microwave without making a mess. We shouldn’t leave leftovers.”

Sanghyeok stared at the two meals in front of him. He looked startled and confused, his growing suspicion that something was off only betrayed by the slightest crease of his eyebrow. He swept his gaze around the table at the five people clearly trying to pretend they weren’t watching him.

“Is everything okay?” He asked, looking directly at Minhyung. Minhyung stiffened and nudged Minseok under the table.

“We made a bet to see which dish you’d eat more of,” Minseok lied smoothly, not missing a beat. He even looked adequately sheepish at the admission, “Loser had to do the dishes.”

Sanghyeok smiled fondly at them, “You guys know I don’t mind doing the dishes.”

Minseok smiled innocently. Jihoon wasn’t sure if he should be concerned about his ability to lie seamlessly or not. “I know, but it’s more fun to make a bet out of it! And you shouldn’t be doing chores anyway. You should rest your wrist.”

Jihoon snapped his head around to look at Sanghyeok, all pettiness forgotten in his panic, “Your wrist? What’s wrong with it? Are you hurt? Since when?”

Sanghyeok looked taken aback, “It happened last year and I’ve already gotten treatment for it. An injury like this never really heals fully. I just have to manage it and rest adequately. Is something wrong?”

Jihoon hoped his default pokerface was still working, because he really needed his inward turmoil to not show on his face. He felt oddly devastated. This was something so important. But Jihoon didn’t know. Of course he didn’t, because he wasn’t special to Sanghyeok. He was just another person looking in from the outside. Even sitting next to each other, the distance between them felt so far.

“Jihoon? Are you feeling dizzy again? Do you want to lay down?” Sanghyeok asked. His voice sounded far away. He was so far away.

“Yeah...” Jihoon struggled to say, “I’m...not feeling well.”

“Do you need help standing up?”

“No, I’m fine.” Jihoon said firmly, the nauseous feeling in his stomach making him dizzy as he stood up. He followed Sanghyeok absently as he tried to organize his thoughts. How was he even feeling right now?

Concern. Mostly. Wrist injuries were devastating for people like them. How could Sanghyeok be so calm about it? Then there was that jealousy again. He wished he were close enough to have known. He wished he could be there for him when bad things happened. He wished he could be one of the people celebrating when something good happened. For some inexplicable reason, he wanted to be a part of Sanghyeok’s life. He was magnetic. It was unfair. He got to be talented, smart, and beautiful both physically and through his oddly enlightened view of the world. He had an air of calmness that soothed and relaxed people. Jihoon wanted nothing more than to bask in it forever.

But why couldn’t he? Why couldn’t he be a part of this? After admiring from afar for this long, here Jihoon was. At his place. Three days in a row. It was progress wasn’t it? Since when was Jihoon the type to mope about something he didn’t have? He wasn’t. If he wanted something he would work for it. That was the type of person he was.

All the feelings in his head suddenly organized themselves neatly and clearly. He didn’t need to understand the concepts of romance or know if he had a crush or not. All he had to know was that he wanted to know Sanghyeok hyung better. He wanted to talk to him. He wanted to see him smile. He wanted to be the reason he was smiling. That was good enough for now. He didn’t need a reason.

It felt as if he returned to the real world, and everything made sense again.

His rush of confidence immediately disappeared when he took in his surroundings. Was he in Sanghyeok’s room? Sitting on his bed? How did he get here? How did he not notice? He was suddenly acutely aware that Sanghyeok was sitting right next to him on the bed. He had his body politely angled away to give Jihoon privacy and his eyes were closed like he was meditating. He was still as a statue and just as beautiful. He thought with a petty satisfaction that Hyeonjun’s sweater was the completely wrong tone for Sanghyeok’s pale complexion. He looked far better in Jihoon’s jacket yesterday.

“Hyung?” Jihoon said tentatively, almost reluctant to disturb his peace, “Sorry about causing trouble again.”

“Jihoon.” Sanghyeok turned to face him with an expression of relief, “Don’t apologize. Are you feeling alright? Should I fetch you something to eat? You said your dizziness was caused by low blood sugar right?”

“Yeah,” Jihoon muttered, feeling guilty about the lie, “I don’t need anything right now though. I just want to rest for a bit longer. What about you? Your injury?”

“My injury is fine, really,” Sanghyeok said in a calming tone, “I’ve learned to manage it and adjust where I need to. I’m grateful for your concerns. It means a lot to me.”

“That sounds like the type of answer you’d give at an interview.” Jihoon said, trying his best not to sound sulky.

Sanghyeok looked amused, “Is it?”

“You don’t have to filter your words around me. Friends can be honest with each other right?” Jihoon said earnestly.

Sanghyeok stared at him, lips parted in a half surprised expression. He looked adorable. Jihoon felt his heart lurch painfully. He didn’t realize someone could be breathtaking to this degree.

“I meant it when I said it meant a lot to me,” Sanghyeok said finally, “I’m glad you see me as a friend. I was never too good at reading people, I was afraid my presence would make you uncomfortable so I never approached you before. Not unless it was in a professional sense.”

“You don’t make me uncomfortable at all.” Jihoon said immediately, “I’m sorry about any misunderstandings I might have caused. Minseok told me there were some speculations that might have been hurtful.”

Sanghyeok smiled, “But you cleared those up immediately didn’t you?”

“I never would’ve reached out first if you didn’t text me.” Jihoon admitted, “And then the second day you also had to come to find me.”

“The second day you had an emergency, it wouldn’t make sense for you to delay getting back.” Sanghyeok pointed out.

“Oh. Yeah. It just happens so often that I forget about it.” Jihoon lied, feeling the guilt weigh down on him further.

“Besides, I’m the older one. I should take responsibility for taking initiative.”

Jihoon frowned internally. Hadn’t he wanted to show Sanghyeok he was mature and reliable? How could he do that if he was too afraid to even message first? He dug his nails into his palm, steeling himself. He would just have to take more initiative from now on. Considering they were much more familiar now it didn’t seem like as much of a daunting task. He could text first if he put his mind to it.

“Has the dizziness passed? Would you like to join the others again?”

“I think I’ll sit here for a bit longer.” Jihoon said, hoping they could extend this moment for just a little longer. Sanghyeok had a nice room. It was neat and fairly minimalist aside from the few stacks of books on the ground. The only photos on the wall were of the other four T1 members. Would he be able to spend more time here if they got to know each other better?

“You’re still not feeling well?” Sanghyeok’s concerned voice cut through his pondering, “Are you sure you don’t want me to get you anything to eat? Or water? Do you think you can try to stand? I’ll make sure you don’t hurt yourself.”

“Hyung, if I fall I’ll crush you.” Jihoon said matter of factly.

Sanghyeok’s concerned expression didn’t falter, “I was taught how to break someone’s fall safely in a CPR course. It works fine even if you’re helping someone taller or heavier. I can also call Minhyung if you want if you’d feel safer that way.”

“No really, I’m fine,” Jihoon said with a reassuring smile. Was Sanghyeok this fussy with all his teammates? It was kinda cute, in addition to the attention making him flustered. Even though he was starting to feel guilty about making Sanghyeok worry, it was hard to feel guilty about lying if this was the result.

“Would you like to lay down? I brought you here because it was the closest room, but I don’t mind if you use my bed. I can also let you have some privacy, I just wanted to make sure you were okay before I left.”

Jihoon felt half tempted to lie down in Sanghyeok’s bed, just to see how it felt. Common sense won out, however, and Jihoon stood back up with a sigh. Hopefully they’d get more time to talk later.

“See hyung? Perfectly fine.”

Sanghyeok studied him for a moment. He felt warm under the scrutiny,

“Okay,” he said finally, “But let me know if you feel off. Oh yeah, here’s your jacket. Thank you for letting me borrow it yesterday.”

Jihoon’s jacket was sitting on the dresser, neatly folded. He reluctantly picked it up and slung it over his arm.

“You can barely call that borrowing,” Jihoon said reproachfully, “Barely 30 seconds after I gave it to you you went back inside.”

“I still appreciate the gesture nonetheless.” Sanghyeok said sincerely, “I tend to get cold easily.”

Jihoon glanced over Sanghyeok’s clothing, “Is that why you borrow Hyeonjun’s stuff?”

“How could you tell it was Hyeonjun’s?” Sanghyeok asked, surprised.

“Oh.” Jihoon scolded himself inwardly at the slip up, “Uhh, Minhyung mentioned it earlier. Something about sweater paws.”

“What are sweater paws?” The words sounded odd in Sanghyeok’s mouth.

Jihoon shrugged, “An internet thing. Anyways, do you guys share clothes often?”

“I suppose so. Minseok likes borrowing from Minhyung sometimes, same with Wooje and Hyeonjun. Hyeonjun tends to worry about my health so he lends me his warmer clothing occasionally.”

“I see.” Jihoon said in an even voice. He followed Sanghyeok back out into the living room to join the others. He couldn’t quite squash the voice in his head that *he* should be the one that fretted over Sanghyeok’s health and lent him jackets when he got cold. Don’t get discouraged, he chided himself. He still could be that person. Especially now that “Sanghyeok gets cold easily” was added to his running list of important facts. Although he should’ve figured that one out earlier with how Sanghyeok would wear his jacket under the burning stage lights without breaking a sweat. He had to be more observant.

“Hyung, how are you feeling?” Minseok’s voice pulled him out of his pondering, “You look different.”

Jihoon glanced to his side to see the others occupied in a squabble about kimchi brands. He leaned closer to Minseok and kept his voice low, "I feel a lot clearer. I think I realized a lot today. Minhyung was right about having to process your feelings."

Minseok brightened, "So you think he was right? About the thing?"

"I'm not fully sure," Jihoon admitted, "But I know that my previous negative emotions were mostly because I wished to be closer to him and was bitter that I wasn't. I still don't know whether that means it's a crush or not. I just know I want to talk to him."

"There's no rush to figure things out." Minseok assured him, "For the record, even though the others are unsure, I think that you would be really good for him."

"I think some of them are a bit more than unsure." Jihoon muttered.

Minseok gave him an amused look, "If I didn't know you well I probably would've been the same. We all love him a lot. He means the world to us. We know we can lean on him for anything, but I don't know if he feels he can rely on us the same way. That's why I think maybe it would be good to have someone on the outside be there for him. He doesn't feel that same sense of responsibility of having to be the strong and dependable one all the time."

Jihoon almost felt emotional, "It means a lot to me. That you trust me like that."

"You remind me of Minhyung a little bit. I think that's why." Minseok laughed, "A less extroverted version of him. With less emotional intelligence."

"Hey!"

Minseok giggled, the sound seemed to light up the room. Minhyung glanced over at the commotion, looking from Minseok to Jihoon and back to Minseok. He raised an eyebrow. Jihoon jerked backwards. He hadn't even realized he was leaning so close to Minseok. He felt a cold shiver pass over him. He could feel three pairs of eyes burning into him now.

Hyeonjun and Wooje exchanged glances. Wooje immediately leaned over and tugged on Sanghyeok's sleeve, "Hyung, can you help me with something in my room? And Minseok hyung? I need both of you there."

Wooje stuck out his bottom lip slightly in response to their confused looks and they immediately caved, leaving Jihoon with Minhyung and Hyeonjun. Jihoon felt himself break out in cold sweat.

"What were you two talking about?" Minhyung asked, voice scarily composed.

"I was just telling him I was sorting out my thoughts." Jihoon said evenly, not letting himself be intimidated.

"Yeah?"

"Yes. He's very understanding."

"I didn't realize you two got so close." Hyeonjun said.

"We were already decent friends since we played together at the asia games." Jihoon responded. Why did this feel like an interrogation?

"I'm going to be blunt here," Minhyung said, "Do you have any bad intentions with him? Are you using him to get closer to Sanghyeok hyung? Or are you genuine?"

"I wouldn't do something like that. I like him because I like him, not because of anything else. Even without...whatever my situation with Sanghyeok hyung is, I would still want to be closer to him. I like him a lot."

Minhyung raised an eyebrow, "Is that so."

Jihoon groaned, “Not like that! I wouldn’t- he’s not my type. You have nothing to worry about.”

“What’s going on?” Minseok asked, eyeing them suspiciously as he returned to the living room, “You aren’t interrogating Jihoon hyung again right?”

Minhyung and Hyeonjun shot each other an alarmed look. Neither of them good enough at lying to fool Minseok.

“No?” Hyeonjun tried, earning him an unimpressed look from Minseok and a giggle from Wooje.

“Jihoon was talking about how Minseok wasn’t his type.” Minhyung blurted, earning him a stunned look from Jihoon.

“I was not!” Jihoon defended himself, glancing over at Minseok in panic.

Thankfully Minseok broke out into uncontrollable laughter, not looking offended at all. He doubled over giggling, Wooje joining in. Sanghyeok glanced from Minseok to Jihoon in confusion. Minhyung grinned, looking unapologetic. Jihoon supposed he did successfully change the topic so maybe it wasn’t so bad after all, even if Jihoon was the one thrown under the bus.

Minseok sat back down, a mischievous smile on his face, “So then, what *is* your type?”

Jihoon reeled back, “How should I know? I don’t think about that stuff.”

“Well it might do you some good to start thinking about it now.” Minhyung said with a not so subtle glance at Sanghyeok, “Might help.”

“What does that mean?” Sanghyeok asked.

Everyone turned to stare at him, “What does what mean?”

He tilted his head, “What is ‘type’ referring to?” he clarified.

Wooje was the first to break the silence, “Woooow, hyung is so cute~”

Minhyung bit back a laugh of his own, “Hyung, when someone asks ‘what is your type’ they’re asking what kind of person you would be interested in. Romantically.”

Sanghyeok’s eyes lit up in understanding, “Ohh,” he glanced over at Minseok and Jihoon, “That conversation earlier makes more sense then. I thought for a second it was referring to mbti types.”

He looked so earnestly interested and not at all embarrassed for not knowing. Maybe it was a small thing, but Jihoon felt his fondness grow a little anyway. It took a certain degree of self-assuredness to ask about things in such a straightforward manner and not be afraid of not knowing. Jihoon realized then that maybe he liked confident people. Maybe that was his type?

“So do you have a type Sanghyeok hyung?”

Jihoon snapped back to the present. He feigned an appropriate interest level and forced himself to take a bite of his food. He hoped he looked casual and not overwhelmingly invested in Sanghyeok’s answer.

“I haven’t thought about that,” he answered honestly.

“But have you ever had a crush before?” Minseok asked.

"I can recall one when I was still in school, but I haven't thought about things like that for a long time. Not for myself anyway." Sanghyeok said, not seeming bothered by it at all, "I believe it's best to let things of that nature happen organically. I don't think I would be able to actively invest time in seeking someone out."

"So how about if you happened to like someone that you already know?" Minseok pressed.

He looked thoughtful, "I would see how the situation progresses then. I've spoken to Heosu about this before."

Jihoon was surprised, "Really? When?"

"When he realized Geonbu had feelings for him and that he reciprocated." Sanghyeok explained, "He never sought out romantic relationships and instead focused on his career, so he wasn't sure what to do when he was confronted with the possibility anyway."

"What did you tell him?" Jihoon asked, feeling oddly nervous.

"The reason he never sought out relationships was because it felt like it would be additional work and effort, but that didn't mean that all relationships would feel like work. He didn't have to spend time seeking people out for that small chance of a connection and the person he was interested in had a rare understanding of the industry he worked in. I told him I thought it was a unique situation, and a blessing if he wished to take it."

"So you don't think dating is a bad idea?" Jihoon said, ignoring the smug and knowing look Minseok gave him.

"Of course not. People with busy jobs may not have time to seek out romantic connections, so I think it's fortunate if it ends up happening organically. It's always more reliable to take that leap of faith with a friend rather than a stranger."

Jihoon tried not to let his elation show. This meant he had a chance. Maybe. Sanghyeok still hadn't answered the question about what his type was yet. What if he didn't like younger men? Or if he didn't like men at all?

"So, what was your first crush like?" Minhyung asked curiously, "You've never told us about that."

"Hmm?" Sanghyeok looked surprised, "I don't really remember much about her. It was a long time ago and not a very formative moment. I suppose that's why it never came up."

Jihoon's heart sank, it was a girl? But that didn't mean anything. According to Minseok Minhyung also dated a girl but Jihoon would bet his life savings that Minhyung was definitely not straight. How could he get more information out of Sanghyeok without sounding weird?

Thankfully Minseok picked up on his conflict and stepped in.

"What about Wangho hyung? Did you ever like him?"

"Wangho?" Sanghyeok looked confused, "I don't believe I've ever thought of him that way."

"Was it because he was a guy?"

"No, I don't really mind that. I just don't think the thought ever crossed my mind."

"That makes sense, you were always so busy," Minseok continued conversationally, thankfully not drawing attention to Jihoon's visible relief at the new information, "So hyung, what do you think your type is then?"

With everyone so invested in Sanghyeok's answer Jihoon didn't even have to feign nonchalance. Apparently this wasn't a topic they've had a chance to pester Sanghyeok about

yet. Sanghyeok seemed taken aback by the sudden attention, “I’m still not sure. I think it would be someone thoughtful and kind.”

“Come on hyung, that’s boring,” Wooje complained, “What about something spicier? Do you prefer tall guys? Buff guys?”

“I don’t-”

“*If you could choose,*” Wooje interrupted, already guessing that Sanghyeok would give a non-answer, “Hypothetically if their personality was the same what physical attributes would you prefer?”

“Is this what the youth talk about these days?” Sanghyeok said with an amused curve to his lips.

“Hyung,” Wooje whined, giving his signature pouty face, “I’m serious.”

It was almost impressive how quickly Sanghyeok melted in response to Wooje’s pouting face.

“In your hypothetical situation I suppose I would prefer someone on the taller side.” Sanghyeok mused.

Minseok gave Jihoon an excited jab in the ribs and Jihoon smacked his elbow away.

“Someone well put together.” he continued “I think effort is more important than natural born attributes.”

Wooje pouted again, “Hyung, why are you so diplomatic all the time? Come on, say something shallow.”

Sanghyeok gave him an indulgent smile, “Is saying I prefer someone with a tall and elegant look not shallow enough?”

“I told you more than that when I talked about my guy problems with you.” Wooje sulked.

“You what?” Hyeonjun sat up in his seat, “Since when do you have guy problems?”

Wooje stuck his tongue out at Hyeonjun and scampered around the table to squeeze in next to Minseok. He tucked his head in the crook of Minseok's neck and Minseok wrapped his arms around the young boy in response. Hyeonjun turned his baffled look to Minhyung and Minhyung patted Hyeonjun’s back sympathetically.

Minseok pet Wooje’s hair gently, “Alright, no more sulking. Wanna come eat snacks and watch fancams in my room?”

“Okay hyung.” Wooje muttered, letting Minseok steer him away without glancing up to look at Hyeonjun.

Hyeonjun watched with a frown as Wooje and Minseok left. Sanghyeok reached out and squeezed Hyeonjun’s hand, “Let them be for a bit. Would you like to join me for my walk today? It’s alright if you aren’t feeling up to it tonight.”

“Actually,” Minhyung cut in, “I think Hyeonjun and I are gonna grab some drinks.” He nudged the sulky looking Hyeonjun, “Like we used to whenever we’d get in a funk about things like this. Remember? It always made us feel better.”

“I guess,” Hyeonjun eyed Jihoon wearily, “I don’t think I want to leave though.”

Minhyung leaned down and whispered something in Hyeonjun’s ear. He fixed Jihoon with another scathing look but didn’t say anything as Minhyung announced that they were going

out and dragged him out the door. Jihoon stared after them, what just happened? What could be so urgent that Hyeonjun would willingly leave Jihoon alone with Sanghyeok?

Jihoon snapped out of his daze when he realized Sanghyeok was cleaning the table himself.

“You can sit down, Jihoon-ah. I can clean up myself. I’m sorry about everyone running out like that. When Wooje is upset he likes to spend time with Minseok, and when Hyeonjun is upset he and Minhyung like to get drinks together.”

Jihoon ignored Sanghyeok and continued to help him clear out the table and move things to the fridge, “So, Wooje asked you for love advice?”

“In a sense. Although I had a feeling he just needed someone to listen.” Even just talking about his teammates brought a fond smile to his face, “I feel grateful they’re comfortable talking to me when they need to, even though I rarely have the answers they need.”

“Minseok tells me you’re comforting just to be around.” Jihoon said, “I don’t think they need you to have all the answers. They just need you.”

“I’m glad you think that.” Sanghyeok said, smiling warmly at Jihoon. He swore he felt his heart skip a beat. This was it. There was no denying it. No matter how much he wanted to. He was, wholly and regrettfully, way too deep down the rabbit hole that was Lee Sanghyeok. But he wasn’t sure he would rather have it any other way.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the nice comments! They really mean a lot since I've had this written for a while now but was too scared to post it :)

"I can't believe he has a crush on someone else! He never even mentioned it to me! Was I too late? Or maybe he was never interested and I was just deluding myself. I need another drink."

Minhyung patted Hyeonjun's back and filled his glass with more soju, "I'm telling you, the person he was talking about was 100% you. Why else would he not tell you about it? I'm convinced Minseok also knows. He won't tell me anything explicitly but he heavily implies and never corrects me when I ask him about how Wooje feels about you."

Hyeonjun tipped back his glass and downed the soju in one gulp. He slammed the glass down on the table in front of Minhyung, "More."

"You haven't even shot your shot yet and you're moping like you got rejected," Minhyung laughed, "Come on, be reasonable. Who else would Wooje be talking about? He doesn't talk to anyone but us! Unlike Minseokie. He's got friends everywhere."

Minhyung sighed, taking a sip of his own drink, "I always wonder, if Minseokie is surrounded by so many adoring people, what if he doesn't choose me in the end?"

Hyeonjun looked up at Minhyung from where he was slumped down on the table, "Is that why you're so incredibly okay with that Chovy guy coming in with his crush on Sanghyeok hyung? Because that's one less person you're 'competing' with. Even though there's no competition and Minseok adores you?"

"I'm not imagining the competition! I swear everyone wants his attention," Minhyung complained, "And that's not the only reason, I trust Minseokie's judgment and he seems to

think Jihoon is a good match.”

Hyeonjun grumbled intelligibly and topped up his glass again.

“Plus we can probably beat him up if we need to. He may be tall but I don’t think that guy’s thrown a punch in his life.”

Hyeonjun looked slightly cheered by that, “I guess so. I’m still worried though. I don’t want hyung getting hurt emotionally either.”

“Well if that happens we can also employ the beating him up strategy,” Minhyung offered, “Although I think sending Minseok to unleash his wrath might be more effective. He’s scary when he’s mad.”

Hyeonjun chuckled, “You would know from all your couple’s spats wouldn’t you.”

“It’s not just me!” Minhyung protested, “Did you hear the tone he used towards Sanghyeok hyung that one time? I could never imagine talking to hyung like that, even if we’re close. It stressed me out to witness it, but it’s lucky hyung really appreciated the bluntness more than anything.”

“You sure know how to pick them.” Hyeonjun snorted.

“Come on, like you don’t let Wooje walk all over you,” Minhyung teased, “He has you wrapped around his finger.”

“At least I’m capable of saying no to him.”

“Saying no and then doing what he said anyway doesn’t count.”

“Shut up.” Hyeonjun poured the rest of the soju into his glass, “More alcohol. Peach flavored this time.”

“You know Wooje is obsessed with you right? He has your shirtless photos saved to his phone.”

Hyeonjun perked up, “Really? How do you know?”

“Minseok told me. He also told me Wooje’s type was ‘hot guys that could pick him up and manhandle him’. I really don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

“He said that?” Hyeonjun asked, eyes wide, “What the heck do those two talk about? I can’t even imagine Wooje saying something that...you know. He just looks so innocent.”

Minhyung laughed, “He’s only barely out of his hormonal teenage phase. Believe me, nothing innocent about that kid. Imagine you’re an awkward and shy kid that does nothing but play games all day, you get scouted into a pro team expecting a bunch of other gangly awkward kinds, and boom, your roommate is hot and has a six pack. You were probably his gay awakening.”

“Maybe.”

“I’m telling you, all you have to do is ask him out. You’re almost there, just one more step.”

“Thanks,” Hyeonjun looked marginally more cheerful now, “Can’t say the same about you though, Minseokie still thinks you’re straight.”

“Hey, don’t call him that. It’s my thing.” Minhyung complained, but there was no heat behind his voice, “And there’s no way he thinks I’m straight. Why would he think that?”

Hyeonjun rolled his eyes, “I don’t know man, might be because you listed a female celebrity when asked about your ideal type and also only dated women in the past?”

“Does he really think I’m straight?” Minhyung said in disbelief.

“Wooje said so,” Hyeonjun said with a shrug, “I don’t know, just act more gay around him or something.”

“That makes no sense.”

“You guys are close, just tell him you like guys. Let him realize you’re an actual possibility. Then ask him out.”

Minhyung sighed, “You make it sound so easy.”

“If Wooje rejects me I’m moving to china. Do you think the LPL would take me?”

“You’re so dramatic.”

Hyeonjun gave him a judgmental look, “Four out of five times we come out drinking it’s because Minseok went to see Deft. Don’t go calling me dramatic.”

“Fine,” Minhyung conceded, “Another bottle?”

“Yes.”

“Apple flavored?”

“Apple flavored.”

“Cheers.”

~

“Minseok might be busy for a bit. I don’t think he would mind if you headed home.”

Jihoon took a deep breath. It was his opportunity. Ask Sanghyeok to hang out. Tell him you’re here to see him too, not just Minseok. Tell him you’ll accompany him on that walk since Hyeonjun wasn’t here to do it.

“Actually, I was wondering if-”

Before he could even finish his sentence, his phone rang. Jihoon almost growled in frustration. He was about to make his first move! He watched helplessly as Sanghyeok gave Jihoon a nod and retreated back into his room to offer privacy.

“I swear to god someone better be dying or I’m going to kill someone.” Jihoon said flatly.

“See, Siwoo hyung, he’s fine!” Suhwan chirped.

“Why did you call our group chat at 9pm on a friday? Don’t you think some people could be busy?” Jihoon said, casting another irritated glance in the direction of Sanghyeok’s room.

“Someone hasn’t slept enough,” Siwoo reprimanded, “I called because I’m worried about you! Geonbu said you were coming home late every day and locking yourself in your room all the time. You also sent all those stressed messages yesterday and didn’t explain it.”

“I’m just busy. Occupied. I have a lot of thoughts.” Jihoon said impatiently, “Is that all? I kinda have to do something right now.”

Suhwan frowned, “Hyung, where are you? That doesn’t look like our dorm.”

Jihoon should’ve turned off his camera. “I’m...visiting Minseok again. I’m at his place.”

“WHAT?” Siwoo gave him a concerned look, “Are you sure you should be doing that? Didn’t it make you upset? I thought you said you’d take care of yourself better? You look more stressed than before!”

“Yeah but that’s only because-” Jihoon bit back the words, lowering his voice in case someone would overhear, “It’s just because you interrupted something. That’s all. I’m actually doing a lot better. I promise. Don’t worry okay?”

Siwoo looked unconvinced, “Are you sure? You know we worry about you right?”

“Yeah, I know. I can catch you up on everything later okay? A lot has happened.”

There was a ping as Geonbu’s face appeared in the call, he did not look happy. “Any reason you called the group chat at 9pm? I was busy and now my boyfriend is making me answer this call out of politeness. This better be important.”

“That’s what I said!” Jihoon huffed.

“I was worried about Jihoon! You were the one that said he was out late all the time and looking stressed.” Siwoo grumbled.

“I’m pretty sure all I said was that he wasn’t home when you called me that one time. You made the other assumptions yourself. Did you really interrupt my date for this? Why didn’t you call Jihoon directly?”

“Or not at all,” Jihoon suggested, “A text would’ve been great.”

Siwoo pouted, “So mean. I wouldn’t have to worry if you would tell me what was going on.”

“Well, I actually just figured out what was going on myself about an hour ago,” Jihoon admitted.

“Oh thank god,” Geonbu sighed, “Please tell me you finally realized you have a crush.”

“Maybe.” Jihoon said, the admission still sounding odd.

Suhwan’s eyes widened, “So you *do* have a crush on Minseok hyung?”

Siwoo’s eyes bugged out of his head, “WHAT?”

“I don’t- stop it. I don’t have a crush on Minseok.” Jihoon sighed, “Please never suggest that again or it’ll be your fault when Minhyung kills me. It took me forever to get him to not hate me and even now I’m still on thin ice. I’m pretty sure it’s solely because I’m Minseok’s friend.”

“Is it Wooje then? Or Minhyung? No, that one doesn’t make sense.” Suhwan muttered.

“Hyeonjun?” Siwoo wondered, “You *were* talking about how good looking he was the other day.”

“How is it possible you guys guessed every wrong answer before the correct one,” Geonbu deadpanned, “You’re all hopeless. There were only four options.”

## “YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON SANGHYEOK?”

“Quiet!” Jihoon snapped, “I’m in their dorm still! Can you not announce it to the entire building?”

“I thought you hated him.” Siwoo said, looking bewildered, “You got this angry look every time you saw him on your screen.”

“Yeah well it turns out I felt like an idiot around him because that’s how it feels to have a crush. But I’ve figured it out now, so I’m fine. More than fine.” Jihoon cast another impatient glance towards Sanghyeok’s room, “Can I go now? I’ll tell you more about it later hyung, I promise.”

“Okay,” Siwoo relented, “But you better give me all the juicy details.”

“Good luck hyung! Fighting!” Suhwan cheered.

Jihoon sighed in relief when the call ended. How should he go about things now? Would it be too awkward to invite Sanghyeok for a walk? It was also getting late, maybe the polite thing to do would be to leave and come back another time.

He knocked on Sanghyeok’s door, “Hyung?”

The door opened. Sanghyeok had changed out of Hyeonjun’s sweater and into a t-shirt. Jihoon tried his best not to stare. He couldn’t for the life of him understand how seeing someone’s forearms could feel scandalous.

“Sorry about that, it was just Siwoo hyung calling.”

“Nothing serious I hope?”

“Not even close. Geonbu was pretty upset at Siwoo for interrupting his date for no reason.”

Sanghyeok chuckled, “I see. I’m glad everything’s okay. Were you going to head back soon? It is getting rather late.”

“I was-” Jihoon bit the inside of his lip, mustering up his resolve, “Would you like to walk with me?”

Sanghyeok looked moderately surprised by the offer but didn’t hesitate, “Of course, let me get a jacket.”

Jihoon breathed a sigh of relief. He did it. Now he just had to make a good impression. What should he talk about? Definitely not league. That was like talking about work. He racked his brain as he followed Sanghyeok out the door. What could he do to make himself charming and desirable? The night air felt good against his skin. It helped him clear his mind a bit. He just needed to make any conversation, get to know Sanghyeok better. Learn things he couldn’t by watching their videos and interviews on repeat.

“Do you take walks a lot?” Jihoon asked, cringing at his own awkwardness, “I mean, it sounded like this was a regular thing. When you invited Hyeonjun.”

Sanghyeok hummed in agreement, “I go on walks with Hyeonjun a lot. I like walking to clear my head and Hyeonjun worries too much to let me go out alone.”

Jihoon begrudgingly agreed with Hyeonjun on this one. There was something anxiety inducing about imagining Sanghyeok walking down the streets alone at night.

“That’s how he first noticed I get cold easily,” Sanghyeok added.

“On the bright side it means you don’t overheat easily either,” Jihoon said, “I hate having to stand under those stage lights and sweat so much my makeup melts off. I was always amazed that you could keep your jacket on while standing on stage.”

Sanghyeok gave him a surprised look, “I didn’t realize I did that.”

“Oh, uh, it’s a lot more obvious to observers I guess,” Jihoon explained, suddenly nervous that Sanghyeok was looking at him, “It’ll show Minseok sweating bullets and then pan to you with your perfectly dry hair and jacket still on.”

“I see.” Sanghyeok said with a puff of laughter, “Hyeonjun said it was because I’m underweight. I’ve been going to the gym with him a few times a week but I don’t think it’s helped much. If anything it’s resulted in weight loss.”

The fact that he went to the gym with Hyeonjun grated on his nerves. To the gym with that guy? With his massive biceps and six pack? Didn’t gym rats always wear those skintight shirts that didn’t leave anything to the imagination? Jihoon squeezed his own arm self consciously. He was in no way out of shape since he exercised regularly for his own health but he was definitely nowhere near the realm of buff. What if that was Sanghyeok’s type?

“Do you like that kind of body type?” Jihoon blurted before he could stop himself, “You know what Wooje said earlier about types. What..what do you think?”

Sanghyeok blinked, looking lost, “Pardon?”

“You know, if you prefer buff people. Or not.” Jihoon mumbled, already too far in to back out.

“Oh.” Sanghyeok’s eyes widened, “Well, I don’t think it matters much to me. Health is the most important, no matter what their appearance is like.”

Jihoon almost groaned out loud. That was barely an answer and somehow the most Sanghyeok answer in existence. It wasn't like he knew how to pull whatever magic Wooje could to make him cough up a better answer anyway. He knew he was absolutely whipped when the sight of Sanghyeok shivering slightly sent his panic levels spiking. "Are you cold? Do you want my jacket? You should've worn more layers."

"Just a brief chill from the wind," Sanghyeok said, waving his concerns off, "The winter clothing is stored away so this is the only jacket I own at the moment."

Jihoon stared at him incredulously, "The only jacket you own is your uniform jacket?"

"I have several in case one gets dirty."

Here stood a man whose entire life was League of Legends. Somehow Jihoon found that hopelessly endearing. He recalled that all his clothing had either the T1 logo or the logo of a brand they were sponsored by. He wouldn't be surprised if Sanghyeok's entire wardrobe was T1 merchandise or sponsored clothing.

He was so cute.

"This is it right?"

"Huh?" Jihoon refocused to realize they were stood right outside the Gen G dormitory. How did he not realize they were headed in this direction? Wait, did Sanghyeok think Jihoon was asking him to walk him back to his dorms instead of taking a normal walk? Jihoon groaned out loud, that was the opposite of the image he wanted to cultivate. He probably seemed even more childish for having asked Sanghyeok to walk him home.

"Jihoon? Are you okay?" Sanghyeok looked worried, "You sounded like you were in pain just now."

He felt Sanghyeok touch his arm gently, peering up at him with concerned eyes. He was pale in the dim streetlight. Glowing. His lips looked soft. Jihoon was most definitely losing his mind. The fact that Sanghyeok was touching his arm was not helping. He was suddenly struck by the urge to return the touch.

*“You’re the most strikingly beautiful person I’ve ever seen.”*

“I feel fine.” Jihoon said instead, averting his eyes, “Thanks for keeping me company on the way back. Can I call you a cab to take you home? I don’t want you walking back alone.”

Sanghyeok retracted his hand and Jihoon felt like he could breathe again, “It’s alright, I can walk.”

“It’s not safe. You called a cab for me last time, remember?”

“That’s different-”

“No it’s not.” Jihoon said firmly, “You wanted to make sure I was safe, and now I want to make sure you’re safe.”

“You’re a lot younger-”

Jihoon grit his teeth, “Why does that matter? If you think about it I’m probably safer walking alone since I’m taller and heavier.”

*“I don’t want you to treat me like a child. If you take care of me I want to take care of you back.”* he swallowed the words bitterly, opting to look away instead.

Sanghyeok looked taken aback by Jihoon’s suddenly harsh tone, “I apologize if it seemed insulting. I wasn’t implying you couldn’t look after yourself. I guess I overstepped since I’m so used to looking after the others. My apologies.”

“No, it’s not that,” Jihoon said quickly, “I don’t mind at all. I actually really like it. I just wanted to do something in return too. I don’t want you to walk home alone any more than you want me to.”

“Alright Jihoon-ah, I’ll call a cab.”

“No, I’ll do it for you.” Jihoon insisted, “Since you paid for mine last time.”

This time he didn’t argue. There was a ghost of a smile on his face.

## Chapter 6

“Geonbu, help.”

Geonbu took his headphones off and glanced over at the man currently sprawled out on his couch. “What do you want?”

“Have you ever been jealous of anyone?”

Geonbu groaned, “I thought you finally realized it was a crush?”

“No, not that. I meant jealous of other people being close to Heosu. Has that happened? He’s pretty close to his new jungler now right?”

“Yes and I want to wring the kid’s neck sometimes.” Geonbu grumbled, “But it’s not his fault our relationship isn’t public. He doesn’t know so he never keeps his goddamn boundaries.”

Jihoon looked surprised, “So you *are* jealous?”

“I’m not jealous because I know where I stand and I’m secure in our relationship. I’m just annoyed sometimes because that kid gets to be close to Heosu and I don’t. It’s always hard seeing someone ‘take your place’ so to say, even if it’s just in a professional sense.”

“So how do you deal with it?”

Geonbu shrugged, “I just tell him. We talk about it. He reassures me. But I’m guessing you can’t do that in your situation can you.”

“No,” Jihoon sighed, “Minseok is the only one that’s fully supportive. Minhyung will follow Minseok’s lead but I know he doesn’t fully like me. At least with those two I don’t have anything to be jealous of. But I don’t know when it comes to the others. Sanghyeok hyung has such a soft spot for the both of them and Wooje always acts cute and clingy around him. Then Hyeonjun is all protective and touchy and annoyingly attractive.”

“Sanghyeok hyung raised those kids, of course they’re all attached to him and him to them. That’s hardly something you have to be jealous of, you’re not applying to be his fifth child.”

“No but you don’t get it,” Jihoon complained, “You don’t see how they act! Hyeonjun keeps lending hyung his clothing and putting his arm around him and everything. They even go to the gym and take walks together. Wooje can demand anything and as long as he pouts Sanghyeok hyung would give in.”

“Jihoon, you sound absolutely ridiculous. They’re like family to him. You can’t be jealous of your crush’s younger brother can you?”

“I can if I want to be,” Jihoon grumbled, “Fine. Forget that. How did you get Heosu to like you? What did you do?”

“I didn’t get him to do anything, we just always got along. The only thing I did was suck it up and make the first move.”

“You’re not being helpful.” Jihoon complained.

“Just spend time with him. Get to know him. It helps if you’re his type. Heosu could do absolutely nothing but exist and I would still fold at the sight of him because he’s cute. No wonder that kid is staring at him all the time.”

“Not jealous, huh?” Jihoon said, amused.

“Shut up. Just spend more time with him. Then drop hints that you like him. Compliment him or say sappy things.”

“What if compliments sound too abrasive or too friendly? If I just told him ‘you’re pretty’ wouldn’t that be too direct? But if I compliment him on his character it might seem too formal and not indicate romantic interest.”

“How am I supposed to know? Go ask Siwoo hyung or something.”

“You’re the one with a boyfriend, Siwoo hyung hasn’t even dated before! How did you start flirting? What kind of things did you say?” Jihoon pressed.

“I told him I missed him every time I saw him and I invited him out whenever my schedule allowed it. I bought him food and gifts every chance I could to show I was thinking of him even though we didn’t see each other often. He also told him he noticed how much I stared at him and that was when he figured out I had feelings for him.”

Jihoon listened attentively. He could definitely use some of those tactics. What would be buy Sanghyeok hyung though? A book? But he didn’t even know what kind of books he liked. His reading list was all over the place and impossible to predict. Snacks? Sanghyeok hyung did need to eat more. Maybe a warmer jacket? But that meant Jihoon wouldn’t have another chance to give him his own jacket. Staring might come off as creepy and not endearing since Jihoon wasn’t as close to Sanghyeok as Geonbu was to Heosu.

Conveniently, his phone started ringing. For once Jihoon was happy to see the call from Siwoo even though he usually hated video calls.

“Jihoon! Oh look you’re home for once.”

Jihoon rolled his eyes, “I’m always home. I only spend a few hours at Minseok’s place when I visit.”

“Alright,” Siwoo looked excited, “Catch me up on everything. How did you go from ‘I hate this guy’ to ‘I have a crush on him’?”

Jihoon cringed, “I never said I hated him. Also please never ever say anything about me having any negative feelings towards Sanghyeok hyung near his teammates. I’d rather keep all my bones intact.”

Siwoo laughed, “You have my word. Now spill.”

“It kinda happened on the second day I went there.” he admitted, “I got there and almost immediately Minhyung pulled me to the side and accused me of having a crush on Sanghyeok hyung. I thought he was crazy of course but then I spent more time with Sanghyeok hyung and I think I’m in love with him now.”

“Woah, woah, woah, that was a quick escalation.”

“That was the abridged version. If I get into my thoughts about him we’ll be here all day.”

“Well go on,” Siwoo said brightly, “Come on, I knew you were a teddy bear deep down. You look absolutely moony just from thinking about him. Drop the cool facade and let your inner simp out. I know you want to.”

Jihoon hesitated for a moment before giving in. When else would he be able to vent his thoughts?

“Hyung he’s so *pretty*.”

“He is isn’t he?” Siwoo agreed enthusiastically. Geonbu rolled his eyes at them, but smiled fondly before he put his headphones on and queued for another game.

“I got so dazed from being near him or staring at him that Minseok had to bail me out by saying I was prone to fainting spells. So now whenever I space out staring at him he just thinks I’m about to pass out.”

“That’s so funny.”

“No it’s not!” Jihoon said in a despaired tone, “It’s embarrassing! The first time it happened was when he touched my arm and my entire brain just stopped working. And then he put his fingers against my neck to check my pulse. I thought I was actually going to faint at that point.”

“Not saying I’m into that, but Sanghyeok hyung has gorgeous hands. I’d let him choke me.”

“Hyung!” Jihoon said with a glare, “Don’t talk about him like that. Can you save your thirst comments for Gi-in hyung.”

“Alright, alright,” Siwoo said in a placating tone, “I’ll leave your crush alone. I wasn’t lying though.”

“Hyung!”

Siwoo laughed, “Okay I’m done, your turn to thirst over Sanghyeok hyung.”

“I wasn’t going to thirst over him,” Jihoon defended himself, “I’m respectful.”

“Oh come on, you can’t tell me you haven’t thought about how it would be to-”

“I haven’t! I just realized I had a crush on him yesterday!” Jihoon felt his cheeks flush. He was trying his best to keep his thoughts in line, but the memory of Sanghyeok looking up at him with his concerned expression and lips parted definitely was not helping. The more he

thought about it the more he realized what a miracle it was that Jihoon hadn't broken composure and kissed him right then and there.

"Well you're definitely thinking about it now. I don't blame you, he's hot. I'm pretty sure half the league has a one sided crush on him. I swear, that man mentions another player once and you better believe that player is bringing it up in every interview they're in for a week."

Jihoon fixed Siwoo with a sulky glare, "I wasn't thinking anything like that. Stop being a bad influence."

"Just do your research before doing anything alright? You don't want to accidentally hurt him."

"No offense hyung but I really do not need you to give me the talk." Jihoon grimaced, "I think he's pretty and I want to kiss him. That's as far as the thoughts go."

"For now," Siwoo snickered, ignoring Jihoon's glare, "Think about the possibilities! Have you seen how thin he is? You could probably pick him up if you wanted to. Shorter people love that kind of thing. Before you freak out, I'm talking about in a romantic sense too. Like if you guys walk a lot and you carry up the stairs as a sweet gesture because he's tired."

"You read too many webtoons."

Siwoo looked unbothered, "Fictional romance is based off of real wants. Geonbu, can you confirm shorter people like to be carried?"

Geonbu frowned at his screen, not looking away from the fight happening, "In game?"

"No you idiot. I was talking about your boyfriend. Does he like it when you pick him up?"

"Yes, why?"

“See, I told you!” Siwoo said triumphantly, not even bothering to acknowledge Geonbu’s follow up question.

“Yeah but hyung isn’t short. I just happen to be taller than him.”

“Anyone that has a preference for taller partners will like getting picked up. Trust me.”

“I still don’t see how I’m supposed to apply this information.”

Siwoo laughed, “Just keep it in mind. You never know. Wait, have you confirmed he’s into guys yet? That one’s kind of important.”

“I’m pretty sure he is. He also said he’s into people that are tall and elegant.”

Siwoo grinned, “Your chances are looking better and better. You’re the epitome of tall and elegant! Royal mid and all that. Wow, I can’t believe you and Geonbu are going to start dating before I do. This is so depressing.”

Jihoon saw a notification appear at the top of his screen and he bolted upright, “Minseok texted me. I gotta go. Talk to you later hyung.”

“Tell me everything when you’re back!”

Minseok: Are you coming over today?

Jihoon: That depends, is this an invitation?

Minseok: Hyeonjun and Wooje are out today, pretty sure Hyeonjun's finally going to confess. It does mean you can talk to Sanghyeok hyung without interference if you want.

Jihoon: I'll be there in 30 minutes

"Geonbu, is your game done? I need your help again."

"Might as well be done with how it's going," he grumbled, "What do you want?"

"What should I wear?"

Geonbu turned and raised an eyebrow at him, "You're asking me?"

"I'm asking you to relay what Heosu likes to see you wear." Jihoon said.

"He likes when I wear soft sweaters and a jacket he can steal when he's cold. He also says jeans look good but those are a pain to wear."

"I don't even think I own jeans."

"I really don't think it matters how you dress. I doubt Sanghyeok hyung would even notice."

Jihoon sighed, "I guess so."

Geonbu softened at the dejected look on Jihoon's face, "I can ask Heosu for some advice okay? I won't say who it's for or mention any names."

Jihoon smiled gratefully, “Thank you.”

~

“So, Siwoo hyung messaged me.”

Jihoon barely held himself back from groaning out loud, “What did he say? I knew I shouldn’t have told him anything.”

Minseok giggled, “Siwoo hyung means the best. He just ranted a lot and seemed completely caught off guard by the whole situation. He said it was adorable how head over heels you were. Which is good to hear, I think you’re way too reserved about showing your expressions around me. I can’t even gauge the severity of your crush.”

“It’s just a habit.” Jihoon said sheepishly, “I feel like it’s better to have a composed expression just in case.”

Minseok jabbed him in the ribs, “Hyung’s never going to notice you like him if you aren’t more expressive. When you stare blankly at him *I* know you’re just infatuated but hyung thinks you’re having a stroke. He asked me about your health yesterday because you apparently spaced out again.”

“It wasn’t my fault. I was caught off guard.”

“Yeah?” Minseok gave him a mischievous grin, “By what?”

“Him.”

“Come on, be more specific.” Minseok pestered, “Or else I’ll go to Siwoo hyung for more details. He says he won’t tell me anything but if I get him talking enough he accidentally spills it anyway.”

How was it someone so cute and innocent looking was so devious?

“What did he accidentally spill?” Jihoon asked, grimacing. Did he say anything particularly embarrassing last night?

“Nothing yet. He did gush about how pretty hyung was for a bit and said you two would look good together. I think he ships it.”

Jihoon sighed in relief, “Okay that could have been so much worse.”

“How so?”

“Let’s just say he was saying some things I definitely didn’t want to hear someone say about Sanghyeok hyung yesterday.”

Minseok wrinkled his nose, “Oh god I think I know what you mean. I never want to think about anything like that in reference to Sanghyeok hyung. You should also never do anything like that in our dorms or Hyeonjun might actually beat you up. And I won’t stop him. I like you but I don’t like you *that* much.”

“Not you too!” Jihoon complained.

“Would you prefer me or Minhyung coming to warn you?”

“Fine.” Jihoon relented, “Thanks for coming down to get me. And for everything else.”

“No problem,” Minseok smiled brightly, “If you need anything else feel free to tell me.”

"What does hyung think of me?" Jihoon asked immediately, not passing up a chance to get more information, "Do you know?"

"He likes you and is pretty comfortable around you, which means you're already ahead of 99% of the population. He also asked after your health yesterday, which is a good sign but I think you should lay off the blushing out and staring or you'll get caught in a lie."

"I'm trying." Jihoon grumbled, "It's difficult."

"If he catches you staring again just tell him you were distracted by his beauty or something like that. He may look stoic but hyung is actually really easily flustered by compliments."

"Really?" Jihoon looked skeptical, "Doesn't he have millions of fans fawning over him every day?"

"Well he's not on social media so he doesn't see all that. And it's different when it comes from someone that actually knows him. Just make sure you show that you're genuine and sincere. He brushes it off easily when it sounds like a joke but gets all flustered and awkward if you show you're serious."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course!" Minseok insisted, "You have to go into things with confidence. It's human to be nervous or awkward but if you show too much distress you'll activate his older brother instincts and get family-zoned."

Jihoon bit his lip nervously, "How can I be sure that didn't happen already? I invited hyung out on a walk yesterday and he thought I was asking him to walk me home. That's bad right?"

Minseok winced, "Maybe, what happened after? Did you clarify?"

“I offered to call him a cab home and may have snapped at him a bit when he kept insisting on walking instead. I said I was worried about him.”

“Then?”

“He agreed to take a cab home after that and he let me pay for it.”

“Did he push back when you offered to pay?”

“No.”

Minseok sighed in relief, “Okay, we can work with that. That’s a good sign. He never lets us pay for anything. You just have to continue being assertive about things. Take the lead and be confident. But keep being yourself while you’re at it. He already likes who you are so don’t try to be someone different.”

“Okay.” Jihoon said, taking a deep breath. Sounded easy enough.

“Anything else?”

“Siwoo said something else yesterday,” Jihoon started, already feeling embarrassed, “Is it true that if someone prefers their partner to be taller they like being picked up?”

Minseok blinked, obviously not having expected that line of questioning, “I mean, the sample size of me and Wooje says yes but I don’t know if that’s enough to make a generalization. How did Siwoo hyung get on this topic?”

“I don’t remember,” Jihoon lied, “It was just so random I thought I’d ask.”

“You’re a good liar,” Minseok noted casually as he opened the door and led Jihoon inside, “I won’t work on me though. I think you and I both know exactly how Siwoo’s brain ended up on that topic but I won’t ask because I really don’t want to think about it.”

“Don’t want to think about what?” Minhyung said, joining them on the couch. He slung one arm around Minseok and Minseok immediately melted against his side. How were these two practically dating without even knowing? Jihoon was half tempted to call Minseok out for somehow being observant enough to spot a lie a mile away but not enough to realize his teammate was very much in love with him.

“Nothing.” Minseok said sweetly, “How did your games go?”

“Terrible. I need you back in my lane.”

“Well if Jihoon hyung sucks it up and asks Sanghyeok hyung to do something we can play together.”

“I’m fine waiting until he leaves,” Minhyung said, eyeing Jihoon with an unreadable expression, “What was the plan today?”

“Well the plan was to give Jihoon a chance to know hyung better without outside interference,” Minseok pouted, “I was trying to be subtle about it but you rejected my offer to play.”

“No, I was just-” Minhyung looked panicked, “I wasn’t rejecting, I was wondering if you were already planning to do something else. I didn’t want to sidetrack anything just because I complained about soloqueue. Also, can I talk to you about something really quick?”

Jihoon had no doubt they were probably talking about him, but decided to politely scroll through his phone while they spoke. He trusted Minseok would defend him anyway. Minhyung had been nothing but reasonable even in the beginning so he would probably

accept Minseok's reasoning without too much argument. Why did it feel like he was fighting for his laws' approval?

"Alright," Minseok said cheerfully, "We're off to play league. Speak now or forever hold your peace."

"I think I'll be okay." Jihoon said, sounding more confident than he felt, "Thanks."

"Okay hyung, good luck!" Minseok chirped, dragging Minhyung away by the hand. Minhyung gave him a nod, looking sincerely encouraging. Jihoon wondered what Minseok told him to completely mollify his concerns so thoroughly. That was two out of four then. Unless he messed up royally somehow.

Taking a deep breath, he knocked on Sanghyeok's door.

"Come in."

Jihoon walked in to see him curled up in his chair with a book. His legs were pulled up to his chest and his chin was resting against his knees. There was something about the sight that activated a wave of cute aggression in Jihoon. How was it possible for anyone to look this adorable? It was hard to believe the man in front of him was five years his elder. When Jihoon didn't say anything, Sanghyeok glanced up from his book. His eyes widened when he saw Jihoon standing in the doorway.

"Jihoon?" Sanghyeok quickly closed his book and stood up, "I'm sorry, I thought it was someone else. It was rude of me not to get the door. I didn't realize you'd be here today."

Jihoon was disappointed at Sanghyeok's sudden change in behavior. It looked like Jihoon hadn't quite reached that point of familiarity that let Sanghyeok drop his need to be polite. Still, the mix up had led to Sanghyeok inviting Jihoon into his room instead of meeting him at the door. He would take the small victories where he could.

"I didn't realize I'd be here today either until about half an hour ago," Jihoon said, "Minseok invited me over."

"Oh," Sanghyeok tipped his head to the side, "Did Minseok send you to get me?"

"Minseok actually just left to play games with Minhyung just now."

Sanghyeok frowned, "I'm sorry, it's uncharacteristic for him to be rude like this. He isn't the type to invite guests over and leave them hanging, I promise yesterday was an exception because Wooje was upset. Would you like me to go talk to him?"

"No!" Jihoon said quickly, masking an alarmed look. This was definitely not how this was supposed to go. "That's not what happened. He wasn't ditching me. I'm actually here to see you."

There. He did it. He said what he needed to. Sanghyeok looked surprised, mouth open like he was intending to say something but wasn't sure what to say.

"I wanted to ask for book recommendations." Jihoon continued, "Minseok said you'd be the best person for that. I'm sorry I didn't tell you I was coming over beforehand. I thought Minseok might've said something."

Sanghyeok smiled kindly, "I would be happy to recommend you some things. Feel free to message me directly if you wish, you don't have to go through Minseok when you want to come over."

"Okay hyung," Jihoon smiled, taking Minseok's advice to let his excitement and joy shine through on his face instead of keeping his expression even. Maybe he was imagining it, but Sanghyeok seemed a bit startled. His gaze lingered on Jihoon's face for a moment too long to be normal before he turned away and gestured to his shelf full of books.

"You can take a look and see if anything interests you. What genre do you prefer?"

Jihoon joined him happily beside the bookshelf, “I’m not sure, I’ve never done a lot of reading.”

He pretended to look at the selection of books while discreetly observing Sanghyeok. They were standing so close that Jihoon could properly gauge their difference in height. He could see the top of Sanghyeok’s head. His hair was fluffy and unstyled. Jihoon couldn’t decide if he preferred this or the infamous middle part. Maybe the proximity was messing with his head, but he swore he could smell Sanghyeok’s shampoo.

“This one is a fairly quick and digestible read. Even if you don’t like it, it won’t be too much time committed. It was originally written in english, so I always wonder if perhaps nuances were lost in translation. Either way, it’s a good starter book.”

“Sounds good hyung,” Jihoon agreed. He barely registered what Sanghyeok was saying, too distracted by the way he looked as he talked about things he was interested in. Jihoon could stand here and listen to Sanghyeok talk about books all day despite his general lack of interest in actually reading.

Sanghyeok turned to hand Jihoon the book and seemed to notice for the first time their close proximity. His eyes widened and his lips parted the same way they always did when he was startled. Jihoon was starting to adore that expression. He had to tilt his head upward to meet Jihoon’s gaze and Jihoon felt himself revel in that fact. The moment his surprise wore off, he took a step backwards.

“Wait,” Jihoon took a step forward and closed the distance again, all but cornering Sanghyeok against the bookshelf. “You have something in your hair,” he lied, reaching over and swiping at an imaginary piece of lint, “There we go. You said this book was easy to read right? What is it about?”

“Oh,” Sanghyeok seemed to take a second to register what Jihoon was saying, realizing that Jihoon had no intention to move from where he was standing. It was a little mean maybe, but Sanghyeok was too polite to push him away or ask him to move and Jihoon knew it. It wasn’t like they were close enough to touch anyway, just close enough that Sanghyeok had to tilt his head upwards to make eye contact. A perfectly reasonable distance.

“Well, the book was originally intended to be a political allegory, but no historical context is really needed to understand the contents of the story.” Sanghyeok’s posture relaxed as he continued talking. His eyes seemed to look past Jihoon at something intangible as he talked about the contents of the book, the corners of his lips curling ever so slightly upwards to indicate a smile. Every heartbeat felt painful as his gaze flitted across every feature on Sanghyeok’s face and landed on his mouth.

“Jihoon?” Sanghyeok’s concerned voice pulled him out of his thoughts, “Are you feeling alright?”

“Yeah.” Jihoon swallowed, his mouth feeling dry. He looked away from Sanghyeok’s face and pinched his arm. He really needed to control himself before he did something impulsive.

“You aren’t dizzy at all? I’m sorry for talking for so long, you should sit down.”

“No, it’s just,” Jihoon’s gaze flickered back to Sanghyeok’s face again, “You’re very...I like.....I like listening to you talk about things you enjoy. That’s all. I got distracted looking at you.”

Just like Minseok said, an adorably flustered expression immediately bloomed across Sanghyeok’s face. He blushed all the way down to his neck, the color soft and warm on his pale skin. Jihoon was struck by the urge to touch his face. His lips. His hair. Something. Anything. He pinched himself harder and averted his gaze, finally taking a step back and giving Sanghyeok room to move if he wanted to.

“Thank you,” Sanghyeok said, still sounding flustered, “I’m glad I wasn’t boring you.”

“Not at all, I could listen to you talk all day.” Jihoon said, confidence flourishing now that he had successfully gotten a reaction out of Sanghyeok.

“I’m happy to hear that,” Sanghyeok said with a shaky smile, looking uncharacteristically off balance. He offered Jihoon the book in his hand, “You can borrow this one, I can also lend you a few more in case you don’t end up liking that one.”

“I’m sure I’ll like anything you pick.”

Sanghyeok let out a soft laugh, “I wouldn’t be so sure. The others wanted to get into reading for a while but didn’t seem to be interested in most things I recommended. Although perhaps reading isn’t for everyone.”

“I’ve never really had an interest in books before,” Jihoon admitted, “But you always look so at peace when you read, so I thought there has to be something special about it right?”

A fond smile graced Sanghyeok’s lips, “Oddly enough that was Minseok’s reason for wanting to read as well. Even if it didn’t end up being something he enjoyed. I think it may be just because I’m older. Who knows, perhaps webcomics and social media serve the same purpose to some people as reading does for me. There may not be anything special about reading itself, but instead finding that one activity that you enjoy.”

How was this man a real person? The amount of fondness and adoration Jihoon felt made his chest ache. He wasn’t sure he was going to survive being around him for extended periods of time lest he spontaneously combust. Jihoon had effectively sealed his fate when he decided he was going to get closer to him. The affection he felt was so deeply rooted it would almost certainly do irreparable damage if Jihoon wished to rid himself of it now.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit down?” Sanghyeok’s voice sounded far away, “Jihoon?”

He felt a gentle hand touch his arm and immediately jerked backwards, “I’m fine! Really. Just a bit overwhelmed. I mean, dizzy. From my condition.”

Sanghyeok nodded in understanding, “Would you like to lay down? You can use my bed if you want or I can help you to the living room. The couch may not be long enough for you to comfortably lay in though.”

“I think I’ll stay here.” Jihoon could see Sanghyeok’s hands hovering cautiously around him as he moved over to sit on the bed. Jihoon reprimanded himself inwardly for having flinched

away from Sanghyeok's touch earlier. What if he thought Jihoon was uncomfortable being touched now? He was such an idiot.

"Do you want me to bring you anything? Water? Food? Or if you'd prefer privacy."

"I'd prefer if you sat next to me instead of at your desk." Jihoon muttered under his breath.

"Pardon?"

"I think I'm okay," Jihoon said in a normal voice this time.

"Are you sure?" Sanghyeok frowned, "I was reading up on dizziness and fainting from low blood sugar and it's suggested that you eat something with simple carbohydrates when you start feeling unwell."

Jihoon felt a stab of panic, if Sanghyeok was researching his supposed condition he would probably start noticing Jihoon was faking it at some point. Maybe Minseok was right about him needing to stop using it as an excuse every time he spaced out.

"You really don't have to worry hyung, I'm perfectly fine. It rarely happens anymore, I promise. You just happen to catch me at bad times."

Sanghyeok looked unconvinced, lips pursed.

"You can check me if you want," Jihoon offered.

The corner of his lip twitched upward in the hint of a smile, "I'll take your word for it Jihoon-ah, but we do have plenty of snacks and fruits in the kitchen. Are you sure there's nothing you want?"

Almost immediately a slew of cheesy responses filled his head. He blamed Siwoo for playing his romance kdramas too loudly, they must've subconsciously absorbed into his brain. Would it be too early to say something like that? Sanghyeok would probably brush it off as a joke if it leaned too far into flirting territory. Maybe finding a middle ground would work.

“Well it would be nice if you sat closer to me but I’m guessing you were talking about food?” Jihoon masked his nervousness with a playful smile, exuding a confidence he most definitely did not feel.

It took Sanghyeok a second to process Jihoon’s words before he immediately stood and walked over to sit next to him, “I apologize, was it difficult to hear me from here? The heating system is still not fully repaired so it’s quite loud.”

That wasn’t quite what Jihoon was getting at, but he’d take anything but rejection as a positive when it came to any attempt at flirting. Maybe he needed to study better techniques to use. Like everything in life, success could always be achieved by a combination of hard work, discipline, and natural talent. According to Siwoo at least, Jihoon was already naturally gifted with the physical attributes he needed. All he needed were the other ingredients.

Sanghyeok resumed talking about books, completely unaware of Jihoon’s renewed rush of determination. Jihoon couldn’t wait for the next time they saw each other. He would be more prepared than ever.

## Chapter 7

“Uh, Jihoon? What are you doing?”

“I’m reading.”

Geonbu gave him an odd look, “Since when do you read? Oh, this is because of Sanghyeok hyung isn’t it? Are you doing this to impress him?”

“I’m just trying out a new hobby.” Jihoon said.

“Sure.” Geonbu said, looking unconvinced, “And how’s that working out for you?”

“I’ve read all the words on all these pages and I still don’t know what the plot is.” Jihoon admitted, “Am I doing it wrong?”

“I think that’s called not liking reading.”

“That’s not true,” Jihoon defended himself, “I liked one of the books hyung showed me today. He read me a few passages from it and it was really nice. I think the words just make less sense when I try to read them myself.”

“Try an audiobook?” Geonbu suggested.

“I can’t,” Jihoon said stubbornly, “Hyung really likes physical books so I have to read them that way too. Besides, how unromantic is it to gift someone an ebook or audiobook?”

“Pretending to like things you don’t won’t do you any favors in the long run,” Geonbu advised, “If you do end up liking it that’s great but if you keep trying and it doesn’t click it’s not the end of the world. Also, Heosu said styling your hair would help. Try that.”

“I thought you said you weren’t gonna tell him it was me!” Jihoon complained.

“I didn’t! He connected the dots himself. It was either you or Siwoo hyung and hyung wouldn’t have asked me to keep his identity confidential.”

Jihoon closed his book and slumped back against the couch, “Fine, what else did he say?”

“Uhhh,” Geonbu frowned as he tried to remember, “Something about wearing long coats. And casual touching. Test out the waters first. Don’t act awkward, things will only be awkward if you make them awkward. If you’re confident then it relaxes the other person.”

Jihoon made a mental note of the advice. He always did better when there were concrete directives. The clothing was the easy part. Learning to style his hair would be a bit more difficult, but he had plenty of reference photos from when people did his hair for him. Then there were the casual touches. The only times Sanghyeok had ever touched him were nothing more than light taps on his arm and the time he checked Jihoon’s pulse. Jihoon was pretty sure he had never initiated physical contact with Sanghyeok before. It just seemed like something taboo, touching Sanghyeok.

“Earth to Jihoon?”

“Oh,” Jihoon blinked up at Geonbu, “Sorry, I was thinking.”

“So you weren’t lying about that zoning out thing huh,” Geonbu looked amused.

“Shut up, go hang out with your boyfriend or something.”

“Actually, about that.” Geonbu looked a bit sheepish, “I was wondering if you were going over to the T1 dorms again today.”

Jihoon gave him a suspicious look, “Why.”

“I was thinking of maybe inviting Heosu over. Since he still has people at his dorm.”

“You still have people in your dorm too! I am the person. in your dorm.”

“Yeah but you’ve been away most evenings anyway.” Geonbu pointed out, “I might as well get something out of it.”

Jihoon’s jaw dropped, “No way, you’re kicking me out because you want to fuck your boyfriend.”

“I am not!” Geonbu denied, “I mean, not only for that reason. I’m not expecting- I’m just saying privacy would be nice just in case. Not that it’s the only reason. We’re just going to order takeout and watch a movie.”

“Oh my god. Please for the love of god do not fuck on our couch. Or at least put down a towel.”

Geonbu groaned, “You’re getting way ahead of yourself. We’re not doing anything on the couch. I don’t even know if we’re doing anything at all! Stop making assumptions, you’re worse than Siwoo hyung.”

“I am not,” Jihoon said, offended, “Siwoo hyung would’ve been way more crude than that.” he glanced down at his ringing phone with a laugh. “Speak of the devil. You want to see how Siwoo hyung would react to this situation? I’ll look like a saint after.”

“It’s a group call,” Geonbu reminded, “Don’t corrupt the kid.”

“Huh?” Siwoo looked confused, “What do you mean? Context. Now. Chop chop.”

Jihoon glanced over at Geonbu, giving him a chance to plead his case first. He just sighed, “Suhwan you should hang up.”

“Huh?” Suhwan looked confused, “Why?”

“Pshh, our Suhwan isn’t as clueless as you guys think. Trust me. I don’t think there’s anyone less innocent than a teenager with full internet access.”

“Geonbu wants to kick me out so he can invite his boyfriend over.” Jihoon said petulantly.

A wide grin spread across Siwoo’s face, “No way, really? Thank fucking god, I don’t think I could handle how grumpy you and your pent of sexual frustration are. I’m not the only one that notices it right? How he’s always grouchy a few hours after he comes back from seeing Heosu?”

Jihoon grimaced, “I didn’t, but thanks for letting me know. Can you tell him he can’t just kick me out?”

Siwoo laughed, “Sorry Jihoon-ah, I think I’m taking Geonbu’s side on this one.”

“What?” Jihoon said, betrayed, “Where am I supposed to go? I can’t just invite myself over to Minseok’s place. I’ve been there almost every day this week. It would be rude.”

Geonbu cracked a smile, “This is the only time you prying into my personal life is working out in my favor.”

“No problem Geonbu,” Siwoo said with a grin, “Sorry Jihoon. Don’t worry we’ll do the same for you when you need the privacy. Trust me, it’s a lot better than trying to sneak around and be quiet.”

“Why am I getting dragged into this?” Jihoon complained, “And I already told you, don’t talk about Sanghyeok hyung like that.”

“Fine, fine.” he conceded, “Geonbu, did you prepare enough supplies? You have to be prepared. You don’t want to hurt him, especially he’s-”

“Okay you’ve stopped being helpful,” Geonbu interrupted, “I can take care of it myself, thanks. I’m leaving.”

“Good luck hyung!” Suhwan called out as Geonbu walked away.

“Okay now, Jihoon-”

“If you say one more word about Sanghyeok hyung I’m hanging up,” Jihoon warned.

Siwoo held his hands up in a placating gesture, “Wasn’t going to. I was just going to offer to contact Minseok for you so you don’t have to ask.”

“Oh.” Jihoon blinked, “That’s actually pretty nice.”

“I’m always nice.” Siwoo huffed, “I’d rather not make you wander outside for hours while Geonbu has his date. I’ll just tell Minseok what’s happening and he’ll probably automatically drag you over to his place without either of us having to ask.”

“You talk to Minseok hyung about Geonbu hyung’s love life?” Suhwan asked.

Siwoo shrugged, “I talk to Minseokie about everything. We have a running list of who in the LCK has had a love life before, which ones have never touched another person in their life, and also a list of all the people that have propositioned Sanghyeok hyung and need to be chased off with a stick.”

“Wait what? There have been other people?” Jihoon looked stunned. A feeling akin to heartburn stirred in his chest.

“Well duh, people aren’t blind. I’m pretty sure everyone has a type of crush on him. Some of them cute and platonic and some of them very much not that.” Siwoo wrinkled his nose, “If you think what I’ve said was bad, you would flip out at the kinds of things I’ve overheard at parties. Some people are very graphic when they’re drunk and comfortable. Surprisingly it’s always the younger ones, I guess their hormones are still running wild.”

“Hyung. I need names.” Jihoon said, dead serious.

Siwoo just laughed, not perturbed by the infuriated look on Jihoon’s face, “I wouldn’t worry Jihoon-ah, I heard everyone that tried struck out pretty bad. Most of the people saying gross things probably never even actually talked to him. They probably just have a vivid imagination.”

Jihoon pinched the bridge of his nose, “Hyung. Please stop talking. I think I’m going to throw up.”

He felt like his skin was going to burn off from the rage. He wasn’t even a violent person but he felt an inexplicable urge to punch something. Or someone. Preferably one of those people that should never have had Sanghyeok’s name in their mouth. He suddenly understood all too well why his teammates could be so protective.

“Ah, I never should’ve brought that up.” Siwoo said with a sigh, “Don’t worry about it okay? I hear everyone that actually approached him in person was really awkward and nervous. Completely harmless. You get just as many admirers too, do you know how many women have come up to me asking if you’re single or if I could give them your number? You should drop your intimidating pokerface so I stop having to deal with the people that are too scared to approach you.”

“Tell them I’m married to league of legends.” Jihoon muttered, welcoming the change in topic.

“I doubt that would put them off,” Siwoo chuckled, “So, how did your visit yesterday go? Minseok told me Sanghyeok hyung looked like he was in a good mood last night.”

“Really?” Jihoon cheered up a bit, “I just went over and talked about books. That’s all.”

“I highly doubt that’s all, considering Minseok is dying to talk to you. I didn’t even tell him you were getting kicked out yet and I’m pretty sure he’ll invite you over tonight.”

Jihoon brightened up at the prospect of seeing Sanghyeok again. It would also be really nice to vent things to Minseok and pester him more about what he meant when he said Sanghyeok looked to be in a good mood.

“Okay, I have to go actually spend time with my family now.” Siwoo said, “Don’t think too much about other people okay? You’re the one that actually has a foot in the door. Just keep doing what you’re doing and I know you’ll get there.”

“Thanks hyung,” Jihoon said with a smile.

“Bye, good luck!”

“Good luck!” Suhwan echoed.

Jihoon sighed and sat back. Siwoo was right. Now was not the time to mope and seethe about nameless faceless people. He had work to do. Things to study. Someone to impress.

“Are you still in here?”

“Yes,” Jihoon called, “Come in.”

Geonbu opened the door and wandered in to look at Jihoon’s computer, “What is that?”

“A list of the books on Sanghyeok hyung’s bookshelf so I don’t accidentally get him a book he already has.” Jihoon said absently, scrolling through an advice forum on his other monitor.

“What are you doing?”

“Studying.”

Geonbu looked at him like he was crazy, “You’re studying? For what?”

“Everything. I want to be prepared. Do you think it’s true that driving is an attractive trait? Or is that just a product of slow motion shots in kdramas? Oh yeah, what hairstyle do you think I should use? I pulled up every media appearance where they styled my hair in the past few months, which one looks the best? What about-”

“Okay wait, let me think,” Geonbu was taken aback by the sudden inflow of information, “Uhh, Heosu says he likes it when I drive him places so it’s a maybe on that first one. As for hairstyles I have absolutely no clue. The one at the very corner looks nice I guess? You should probably ask Minseok. Is that a psychology textbook?”

“I want to get better at reading his facial expressions and body language. So I know I’m not making him uncomfortable or anything.”

Geonbu frowned in concern, "You don't think you're doing too much?"

"Not at all. If anything, doing this helps make me less nervous. It's like playing extra soloqueue games before a match. It might be tiring but sometimes it can help calm your nerves. I like this kind of thing. It's reassuring. I'd feel too restless if I were idle. It would just make me more nervous."

"If you say so," Geonbu said with a shrug, "When are you heading over?"

"I'm meeting Minseok at a cafe soon. I'll stay out as late as I can."

"You don't have to, you usually come back at around 10pm right? That's good enough."

"You can't kick me out and then start being generous now." Jihoon said with a laugh, "If I don't text, just assume I'm getting back at midnight."

"Thanks," Geonbu said gratefully, "No matter what happens I just want a nice peaceful night. We haven't had a chance to actually be alone since we got together. It's always in occupied dorms or in public where we have to hide our faces."

"I guess I'll just have to be gone more often."

Geonbu snorted, "Make this thing with Sanghyeok hyung work out and hopefully you will be."

"Hopefully."

~

“Dressing up today are we?” Minseok teased, eyeing Jihoon’s hair and clothes.

“How does it look?” Jihoon asked nervously.

“You look great.” Minseok assured, “A very mature look. But still subtle. Alright, now you’re going to spill whatever the heck you did yesterday to put hyung in such a good mood.”

“We just talked about books in his room. He recommended some books to me and read a few passages from the current book he was reading. If he ever made an audiobook I’d buy a hundred copies of it.”

Minseok smiled, “You’re being a lot more transparent with your emotions.”

Jihoon felt too excited to bother containing it, “I tried it yesterday and I think hyung noticed. I guess it stuck after that.”

“That could be part of the reason he was in such a good mood,” Minseok contemplated, “Because you finally showed how comfortable you were around him. He’s always struggled with people being awkward or uncomfortable around him because of his image or his demeanor. He doesn’t say it but I know it bothers him sometimes.”

“I also tried the compliment thing you told me to do,” Jihoon said, excitement lacing through his voice, “And it worked!”

“No way. What did you say?”

“I kinda got caught staring at him again, so I said something about liking to watch him talk about his hobbies. He looked really flustered after that. I don’t think you understand Minseokie, he’s so cute when he blushes. I thought I would die.”

“You’re a bigger simp than Wooje,” Minseok said with a laugh, “You’re just like him but more wholesome.”

“Speaking of, do you think Wooje and Hyeonjun will ease up on me now that they got together? Things did work out between them yesterday right?”

Minseok sipped on his drink, “Of course, they went to the arcade and Hyeonjun spent way too much money to win him a plushie when he could’ve bought one for half the price. They’re attached at the hip now, even more than before. Don’t worry though, they aren’t trying to chase you away, they just want to test you to see if you meet their standards.”

Jihoon perked up in interest, “They don’t want to chase me away?”

“Nah, they also want the best for Sanghyeok hyung. They just have to make sure you qualify as that. I think Hyeonjun actually respects that you didn’t back down when he tried to scare you off at first. It shows that you’re serious. The fact that hyung looked really happy yesterday after seeing you is definitely also helping your case. That’s all we really want, for him to be happy.”

“I’m glad.” Jihoon felt like a weight lifted off his shoulders, “I was worried I might’ve made him uncomfortable yesterday. I kinda invaded his personal space a bit by standing too close to him.”

“He would just move away if he was uncomfortable, you’re overthinking it.”

“Uhhh about that,” Jihoon looked down at his drink with a guilty expression, “I may have trapped him against the bookshelf slightly. I wasn’t touching him or anything though! We were still a good foot apart but he looked uncomfortable for a second before he relaxed.”

“Hmmm.” Minseok laced his fingers together and rested his chin on them, “That’s odd. He’s usually really good at hiding when he’s uncomfortable. It doesn’t show in his body language but it shows on his face. His lips will be pressed together ever so slightly and his jaw will be tense.”

“Really? When it happened his body turned stiff and he looked surprised.” Jihoon told him, “So that isn’t normal for him?”

“Not at all,” Minseok looked at him with a calculating expression, “Was he nervous around you? Nervous about the proximity maybe. Something had to have happened. More detail. I need more detail.”

“So you can psychoanalyze someone just from a few short descriptions but you can’t tell Minhyung is in love with you?” Jihoon teased.

“Do you want my help or not?” Minseok said with a pout.

“Fine, go on.”

“Like I was saying. Something had to have changed. Something that made him a bit nervous around you. Not enough to prevent him from talking to you, but enough to make him aware of your physical presence. Maybe it was because you were more emotionally transparent? People have a certain glow to them when they smile genuinely.”

“Maybe. It did seem like he stared a little but I wasn’t sure if I was imagining it.”

“Can you think of anything else that happened? How exactly did you approach him to get that close?”

“I just stood really close to him when we were looking at the books,” Jihoon recalled, “And then when he turned to look at me he seemed startled and tried to back away. I kind of moved closer to him impulsively after that and trapped him against the bookshelf.”

Minseok clapped his hands together, “It makes sense! He probably realized how attractive you are! Proximity has a funny way of making you so much more aware of the other person.

That's why he was startled and nervous. See, if that wasn't the case he would've just backed away without flinching. But he did, right? He must've realized at that distance that you were exactly his preferred height and that you weren't bad looking either."

"Thanks, I aspire to be not bad looking."

Minseok smacked Jihoon, "Shut up, I'm saying that in my terms. You aren't my type."

"How can you be sure it was a 'oh this guy is cute' type of startled and not the 'why is this weirdo so close to me' type of surprise?" Jihoon asked, "And if it's the first one how do you know it's a 'I'm attracted to this guy' type of flustered and not a 'I'm having a natural reaction to being close to a good looking person' type of flustered."

"Well first of all, if he thought you were a weirdo he would be way too polite to openly show a reaction to your proximity. He'd keep a polite face and just step away. As for the second one, Hyeonjun walks around with his shirt off during the summer and hyung doesn't bat an eye. When he first started doing it even Minhyung was flustered, but Sanghyeok hyung acted like he didn't even notice. He once bumped face first into Hyeonjun's bare chest and did nothing but apologize and keep walking."

"Why is Hyeonjun your go to example of a good looking person?" Jihoon huffed, not caring if he sounded childish, "Does he walk around with his shirt off to brag or show off or something?"

"You can't still be jealous of Hyeonjun," Minseok snickered.

"Not even just that, I heard from Siwoo hyung today that apparently a bunch of people have already tried to get with Sanghyeok hyung? Is it still happening?"

"Besides Bdd hyung's puppy love I don't think I've seen it recently." Minseok said, looking thoughtful, "We haven't been to many public events so maybe that's why."

Jihoon ground his teeth together, “Next time I play against that guy I’m going to crush him so hard he retires.”

Minseok laughed, “So you’re the jealous type huh? I think it’s cute when Bdd hyung mentions Sanghyeok hyung in interviews.”

“It’s not cute. Besides, you can’t judge me for that. Your boyfriend has the most extensive and well documented jealous streak in existence.”

“He’s not my boyfriend!” Minseok protested, “Minhyung’s just joking around when he says stuff like that. He’s also talking about in game things and not romance. Lane partners and such.”

“How can someone so good at reading social cues be so bad at noticing the one social cue literally everyone else can pick up on?”

“Stop changing the topic to me and Minhyung.” Minseok reprimanded, “Lucky for you, I think Sanghyeok hyung thinks jealousy is endearing. The non toxic kind at least. He always looks at Minhyung really fondly whenever he does his whole jealous boyfriend act.”

“It’s not an act.”

“Shut up. The point is, you made progress yesterday. He noticed you were good looking. The fact that you dressed up today is perfect! Now that your appearance is on his radar he’ll definitely notice the effort you put in. How did you even do your hair like that? Is your stylist not on vacation?”

“I did it myself, obviously.”

Minseok raised an eyebrow, “Wow. Where did my ‘pajama pants only and doesn’t believe in conditioner’ hyung go? Where did you even get hair spray?”

“Siwoo hyung,” Jihoon admitted, “But I’ve been researching it. I’ll buy my own stuff soon, today was just short notice. Geonbu says Heosu really likes this kind of jacket on him, you think it’ll work for Sanghyeok too?”

“I’m positive.” Minseok said reassuringly, “Ready to head back now? I can tell you about all of Sanghyeok hyung’s suitors on the way if you want.”

“Why would I want that?” Jihoon asked, baffled, “I thought you said there weren’t any besides that one guy!”

“Won’t even say his name now? You’re just like Minhyungie with Deft.” Minseok laughed.

“Tell me who.” Jihoon insisted.

“Just a bunch of young up and coming players. They ask after hyung all the time. All his old teammates get pestered once in a while with the ‘is he single’ or ‘does he like men’ questions. Impact hyung gets a lot of them since he plays in a more tolerant region. I didn’t mention them earlier because *technically* they’ve never approached him. I wonder what it is about him that attracts younger people.” Minseok mused.

“If you don’t stop talking about all the younger guys chasing after Sanghyeok hyung I’m going to pour red bull into your keyboard.” Jihoon threatened, feeling his anger from earlier trickle back into his system.

Minseok grinned unapologetically, “Minhyungie said jealousy was a confidence booster, so you’re welcome. The dorm is all yours, I’m going out with Minhyung and I’m 99% sure dumb and dumber are off doing something I really don’t want to know about.”

“You’re ditching immediately?”

“Didn’t we just spend an hour chatting at a cafe? How is that immediately?” Minseok pointed out.

“Oh yeah.” Jihoon said sheepishly.

Minseok squeezed his arm, “Don’t go getting nervous now. You look great. You’ll do great.”

“I didn’t realize you liked that kind of style,” Minhyung said reproachfully.

Minseok giggled and immediately walked across the room to greet him with a hug, “I’m just trying to hype him up Minhyungie. That’s all. Are you ready to go?”

Minhyung immediately melted at the sight of Minseok’s smile, “Of course,” he said softly, “Do you want me to carry your bag?”

Seriously, how did Minseok not see it?

Jihoon took a deep breath. Okay. It was just him and Sanghyeok again. He checked his hair quickly in the mirror, it still looked presentable. Would it look too unnatural to keep his jacket on inside? Did Sanghyeok even know he was coming over today? He took another breath to steady his nerves before knocking on Sanghyeok’s door. Everything would be fine if Minseok was correct, and Minseok was usually correct.

“Come in.”

Jihoon opened the door eagerly, greeted by the sight of Sanghyeok sitting at his chair. He had his knees curled up to his chest as usual and it looked like he was vod reviewing one of his games. Jihoon just stood there smiling, waiting for Sanghyeok to notice.

After a moment of silence he finally swiveled his chair around, eyes widening when they landed on Jihoon, “Jihoon? I didn’t realize you were coming over today.” his eyes stayed

fixed on Jihoon's face. He looked too frozen in place to jump out of his chair the way he did last time he accidentally invited Jihoon into his room.

Jihoon walked over confidently, leaning against Sanghyeok's chair to peer at his screen, "How old is this vod? We haven't had scrims lately have we?"

"It's from a few weeks ago." Sanghyeok responded. His voice sounded a bit off, but his expression and posture had returned back to normal. He uncurled himself and leaned forward in his chair to click out of the league client, "How was the cafe you and Minseok went to?"

Jihoon removed his arm from the back of Sanghyeok's chair and straightened up, "It was alright. The drinks at those places are always overpriced."

Sanghyeok smiled slightly, any trace of his panic earlier completely gone, "Places like that are about ambiance and good company. The drinks are rarely worth their weight on their own."

"Minseok liked his at least," Jihoon said, trying not to feel discouraged at Sanghyeok's sudden complete indifference. He knew he didn't imagine the wide eyed expression he saw when he first walked in. He was probably just really good at maintaining his relaxed demeanor after so many years of practice. That meant it was just his flirting ability against Sanghyeok's discipline and composure now.

"I brought back the books you lent me," Jihoon said, pulling them out of his bag, "I didn't end up finishing them, I guess I found them difficult to follow."

Sanghyeok stood up and moved to put the books back on the shelf, "I did say I wasn't very good at recommending things. It's also perfectly okay if you just realized reading isn't for you."

"Of course not, I think I just need to try another one. Can you recommend me something else?" Jihoon asked. He walked over to join Sanghyeok by the bookshelves again. He stood slightly behind the shorter man and leaned over to look at the selection of books. It was something he saw online, positioning that would allow him to get closer while still seeming

unintentional. He could feel Sanghyeok's hair brush against his cheek. A glance down told him that Sanghyeok was freezing up again.

"Why don't we try something more narrative driven?" Sanghyeok casually stepped away from Jihoon to reach for a book on another shelf, "These sorts of books are a lot more grounded and easy to follow. You liked the book I was reading yesterday right?"

Jihoon chuckled, "I think I just liked that one because you read it to me hyung."

"Oh," Sanghyeok looked at him thoughtfully, "Do you prefer audiobooks? Some people prefer auditory input."

"Maybe if you were the one voicing the audiobook." Jihoon tried again, hoping Sanghyeok would catch on to what he was saying this time, "I'd listen to it all day."

"I'm sure we could find an audiobook with a human voiceover," Sanghyeok said, completely oblivious to the compliment Jihoon was trying to throw at him, "Would you like me to take a look?"

Maybe subtlety wasn't working.

"That's fine hyung, what was the book you were going to recommend?" Jihoon tried to lean closer again, but this time Sanghyeok leaned to the side. Was he doing it to give Jihoon room to see the book? Or because he was avoiding close proximity again? He honestly couldn't tell. Sanghyeok's expression betrayed nothing as he continued to talk about the book he was holding.

"Feel free to flip through it and get a sense of whether you like it or not," Sanghyeok suggested, "I can also find a few more options you can try. Unless- how long were you planning on staying today?"

“As long as you let me.” Jihoon smiled warmly. He met Sanghyeok’s gaze unflinchingly and the other man immediately glanced away. Definitely not typical behavior. “Oh look, I won the staring contest this time.” Jihoon said with a light laugh, “Next time we go on lanemates I’ll be sure to beat you.”

A small smile graced Sanghyeok’s face, “You remember that?”

“Of course. It was the only time that segment we actually got to do something together.” Jihoon recalled, “Yet they spent so much time talking about you and Bdd.”

Sanghyeok laughed, “I remember, I was asked about that in quite a few interviews.”

“Yet you never said whether or not he finally got your number,” Jihoon said, trying his best to sound casual, “So?”

“Yes, I did give Boseong my number.” Sanghyeok said, sounding amused, “I’m surprised you keep up with minor interviews like that.”

*‘Since when were you on first name basis with him?’*

Jihoon swallowed his petty jealousy, “I watch everything you’re in.” he said smoothly. Apparently he didn’t mask his annoyance well enough, because Sanghyeok glanced over at him with a mildly confused expression.

He didn’t make a comment, and instead offered Jihoon another book, “You can look through this one too. Take as much time as you want, I didn’t really have plans for today so you’re free to stay as long as you want.”

“Thank you hyung,” Jihoon smiled and Sanghyeok looked away again. Not quick enough to be suspicious but deliberate enough that Jihoon picked up on it. “I’m sorry for dropping by without warning again. I really thought Minseok would let you know I was coming over this time.”

“He only told me he was going to a cafe with you,” Sanghyeok noted. He gestured at the bed in an invitation for Jihoon to sit down. He sat back down in his own chair, legs twitching like he instinctively wanted to pull his legs up on the chair but decided against it. Maybe he wasn’t fully comfortable around Jihoon yet. It was a shame, he looked really cute when he was curled up like that.

“So he didn’t tell you I was exiled because Geonbu wanted to have his boyfriend over?”

Sanghyeok looked surprised, “He didn’t, no. I’m sorry that happened.”

“No, no, it’s perfectly fine,” Jihoon said quickly, “I’m happy to give them privacy and all that. They deserve some time to themselves. Plus I’d rather not overhear anything anyway.”

“I see,” Sanghyeok looked flustered, ears turning red, “I’m, uh, very happy for them.”

Jihoon rested his elbows on his knees and leaned forward with a hopelessly infatuated smile, “Hyung, you’re so cute.”

“I-” Sanghyeok stared at Jihoon with wide eyes, too stunned to speak. He reminded Jihoon of a startled cat. He blinked. Once. Twice. He glanced away and swiped at his own hair self-consciously, “I’m-” he cleared his throat, “I don’t think- ah, I’m not very used to people so candid about such matters. It’s a beneficial thing of course, destigmatizing the topic is the best way to promote better education and safety. After all, suppressing all conversation on the topic will only result in the spreading of misinformation and increased shame surrounding those situations. That sort of climate makes it really difficult for people to explore that side of themselves in a safe and healthy way and I don’t mean to contribute to that atmosphere with my own attitudes and reactions-”

Jihoon snapped Sanghyeok out of his flustered rambling when he burst out laughing. The amount of fondness contained in his body made him feel like he was on the brink of combusting. How could someone be this adorable? Sanghyeok’s face was completely flushed red now, a thoroughly embarrassed expression on his face. To his credit, he met Jihoon’s eyes anyway when he finally got his laughter under control.

“My apologies, I’m unsure what I was trying to say.” Sanghyeok said awkwardly, averting his eyes again.

“Why are you apologizing? That was the best thing I’ve witnessed all day.” Jihoon ducked his head in an attempt to meet Sanghyeok’s lowered gaze, “I didn’t realize hyung had such a cute side to him. Well maybe I did, but I like seeing it in person.”

“I-” Sanghyeok cleared his throat, his expression smoothing out with practiced ease, “Thank you Jihoon-ah. I really appreciate you trying to make the situation less mortifying.”

Is that what Sanghyeok thought Jihoon was trying to do? Minseok wasn’t kidding when he said everything went over Sanghyeok’s head.

Sanghyeok smiled, perfectly pleasant and polite, “You said you were staying for a while right? Would you like to get dinner?”

“Of course,” Jihoon agreed immediately, “Where would you want to go?”

“There’s a nice restaurant within walking distance that makes good haemul pajeon and kimchi stew.”

“Sounds good.”

He rummaged through his closet for a cap and face mask, “Do you think it would be too conspicuous to wear my team jacket? Maybe I should borrow something from Hyeonjun.”

“No!” Jihoon said immediately, drawing a confused look from Sanghyeok, “I mean, why don’t you just borrow my jacket? I’m wearing a sweater underneath it anyway. Here.”

His hands brushed against Sanghyeok's shoulders as he draped the jacket around him. He could feel Sanghyeok tense slightly at the contact. Was that the first time Jihoon actually touched him? His hand twitched. He wanted to do it again. To touch him and feel him react. He clenched his fist and dug his nails into his palm to quash the urge. With difficulty, he withdrew his hand and schooled his expression into something acceptable. Something hopefully less intense.

But he looked so beautiful. With the face mask on and Jihoon's borrowed coat draped over his shoulders, he suddenly had a regal aura to him. Nothing but angles and sharp eyes. Turns out the natural upward lilt of his lips did wonders for softening his expression because this version seemed night and day from the version of Sanghyeok Jihoon had gotten to know over the past few days. His eyes were piercing and distinctive as he looked over at Jihoon. Even with his face covered Jihoon was sure he could recognize those eyes anywhere.

"I changed my mind," Jihoon blurted, panicking, "We should stay in. Order takeout."

Sanghyeok tilted his head quizzically, looking even more catlike than he usually did, "If you'd prefer. Are you feeling alright?"

"Yep. Just suddenly didn't feel like going outside."

Sanghyeok unhooked the mask from his ears to reveal a concerned downward tilt of his mouth. It calmed Jihoon a bit to see his entire face again. It was less unnerving. Sanghyeok fished his phone out of his pocket and handed it to Jihoon, "Would you like to choose what to order? I'm alright with anything. Do you want to sit down? You looked a bit off just now. Should I get you something to eat?"

He could help but smile fondly, "Hyung aren't we ordering food? If I eat something now it'll spoil my appetite. Besides, I feel fine. I was just distracted earlier because I realized my jacket looks better on you."

The attempt at a compliment flew disastrously wide as Sanghyeok quickly shrugged Jihoon's jacket off and held it out to him, "Don't say things like that. I think this sort of style suits you very well." Sanghyeok offered him a genuine smile, "Don't get down on yourself."

“Thanks hyung,” Jihoon said glumly, taking his jacket back. He needed to switch tactics. Something more obvious. Something that couldn’t be misconstrued. Somehow all the confidence he felt when he was preparing had all dissipated. Even calling him cute earlier had taken way too much willpower. Now the uncertainty was creeping back in.

“Take your time ordering, I’m going to clean up the dining area.”

“Okay hyung.”

The moment Sanghyeok was out the door Jihoon dialed Minseok’s number and prayed he would pick up. He was one step away from returning to his awkward day one state. He was definitely not up to embarrass himself again, not when things were going so well.

“Jihoon hyung?”

A wave of relief washed over him, “Minseokie, I need your help. I think I’m going crazy. When I got here it seemed like things were going well and he seemed kind of nervous but in a cute way but then he suddenly now he’s completely unaffected by anything I say or do and are you completely sure your analysis of this was correct?”

“Woah, woah, slow down. Breathe. What did you say?”

“Well first I complimented his voice indirectly and he didn’t notice so I called him cute and he basically ignored it and then I said my jacket looked good on him and he thought I was having a self esteem issue.”

“Hyung. Breathe.”

“Sorry.” Jihoon sighed, trying his best to calm his nerves.

“Stop overthinking it.” Minseok said firmly, “You’re doing fine. Hyung is just a brick wall. Things don’t get through to him easily and he reads between all the wrong lines. When he does that with me, I just tell him exactly what I actually mean. Try that, but not with anything too extreme. Small steps. Don’t lose confidence. You need the upper hand, it’s easy to get nervous if you’re playing from behind. You’re already a step ahead right now, push your lead and don’t play scared. You’re the best at that kind of thing.”

“This isn’t league!” Jihoon hissed, still panicked.

“It’s the same concept. If you play scared nothing will ever happen. Don’t lose confidence! Things will only get worse if you play from a low ground.”

“He’s coming back!” Jihoon whispered quickly, “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Have you decided what you want to eat yet?” Sanghyeok glanced down at the phone next to Jihoon. The screen was dark and most definitely not displaying the delivery app he was supposed to be scrolling through.

“Oh, the screen turned off and I didn’t know the password.” Jihoon lied easily.

Sanghyeok stared at him with an odd expression on his face, “My phone doesn’t have a password.”

Shit. The panic began to curl at the edges of his brain again. Who doesn’t have a password on their phone? Of course Jihoon was talking to the one person that his lie wouldn’t work with.

“Jihoon啊, are you okay?” Sanghyeok sat next to him on the bed.

Jihoon met his concerned gaze with mixed feelings. Sanghyeok’s gaze was steady, nothing like the nervous glances earlier. Did he have it all wrong? What if it was something else making Sanghyeok flustered? What else would make the most polite and proper person he knew avoid eye contact like that? Usually Jihoon was good at following instructions.

Precision, refinement, methodical execution. All things he was known for. So why did he suddenly feel like throwing caution to the wind?

“Hyung, do you think I’m handsome?”

Sanghyeok froze, averting his gaze quickly with a nervousness reminiscent of earlier, “Of course. You’re a very handsome person.”

“No, I’m asking if *you* think I’m handsome.” Jihoon pressed, now fueled more by frustration and reckless abandon than confidence.

“Of course.” Sanghyeok said again. His eyes flickered back towards Jihoon in a feeble attempt at polite eye contact before flitting away to focus on the wall behind Jihoon. “Are you having concerns about your appearance? I’m not really the best person to consult about things like this.”

Jihoon moved back into his line of sight, “I don’t believe you. You won’t even look me in the eye when you say it.”

“I-” Sanghyeok swallowed nervously. His gaze slowly moved upwards until he was looking directly at Jihoon. All composure was gone. Panic showed on his face clear as day and Jihoon felt his confidence return with a vengeance. Maybe Minseok was right after all, he did function better when he had the upper hand. It was night and day. He had never felt more alive.

He leaned closer, not breaking eye contact, “What do you think hyung?”

“I-I think you’re handsome,” Sanghyeok stuttered out, immediately looking away in embarrassment.

“Why won’t you look at me then?” Jihoon teased.

“I-” Sanghyeok gave Jihoon another helpless glance before averting his eyes again, “I’m sorry, I’m feeling a bit off. I don’t know what came over me. Of course you’re handsome Jihoon-ah. Everyone thinks so. You don’t have anything to worry about.”

His voice still sounded unsteady, but he seemed to have regained some of his composure at least. Jihoon was simultaneously impressed and disappointed in how quickly Sanghyeok recovered. He wanted nothing more than to keep pushing him, to see that adorably flustered expression on his face again. To feel so incredibly in control.

Both for his own and Sanghyeok’s sanity, Jihoon mustered up the willpower to pull away and give Sanghyeok space to breathe. He could feel himself shaking from the adrenaline rush, his brain buzzing like he was drunk.

“Sorry hyung, did I startle you?”

“No, I’m alright,” Sanghyeok said quickly, still not looking in Jihoon’s direction, “It seems you’ve had some intense emotions on this topic. I’m always here to listen even if this isn’t my area of comfort.”

Just like that, all the built up tension and intensity was washed away by a wave of confusion, “Hyung, what are you talking about?”

“I know it can be difficult seeing your friends begin to get into relationships, especially in an industry where the possibility seems so out of the question. Just know that it has nothing to do with any of your own attributes.”

Jihoon was dumbfounded. Was this what Minseok meant by Sanghyeok reading between all the wrong lines? He wanted to pull out his own hair, “Hyung, what are you talking about? I don’t care about that. It’s like I said earlier. I was just asking you because I wanted your opinion. Your opinion. Nothing else. I’m perfectly fine with how I look as long as you like it.”

Sanghyeok stared blankly at him and Jihoon wondered for a moment if he was too direct.

“Support from those you value the opinions of are very important,” Sanghyeok said with a nod of understanding even though he could not be further away from having grasped the point, “I’m glad you consider me one of those people. It means a lot to me.”

Jihoon was going to scream.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“So, how did it go? You two looked pretty cozy.”

“Yeah, before you two walked in and interrupted.” Jihoon said, casting a glance toward the dining table where Sanghyeok was now talking to Minhyung, “He was reading his book to me. It was nice. I think I like books, just not the reading part.”

“Okay but how did you get there?” Minseok asked, “I need context, how did you go from freaking out at me over the phone to sitting on the couch reading the same book? Very far apart I might add. How could you even see the words from that far away?”

“I wasn’t the one reading anyway.” Jihoon said with a shrug, “Every time I get too close he freezes up a little so I didn’t want to make him too uncomfortable.”

“Okay, but isn’t the whole point to push him out of his comfort zone a bit? He’s so comfortable talking to you that there’s no way he freezes up at close proximity unless something else is going on. How are we going to test the theory if you won’t even get close to him?”

“About that.” Jihoon glanced over to make sure Sanghyeok was still occupied, “I may have done that. Uh, not so subtly. Earlier. Probably right after I called you and you told me not to do anything extreme.”

“Are you serious?” Minseok hissed under his breath, “What did you do?”

Jihoon buried his face in his hands, “All I’ll say is that he definitely became really flustered. That’s a good thing right?”

“What did you do?” Minseok asked again, looking suspicious.

“I didn’t lay a finger on him,” Jihoon promised, “I may have just been really blunt and direct about something. He kind of freaked out but then a minute later he drew one of his impressively wrong conclusions and started acting normal again.”

“Did you correct him?”

“Nope.” Jihoon admitted, “I didn’t know how without exposing myself.”

Minseok groaned, “You know the more misconceptions he has the harder this is right?”

“Why don’t you just talk to him directly? Aren’t you the one he confides in the most?”

Minseok eyed him wearily, “Yeah, but if I talk to him about it I can’t help you anymore. It would feel weird. Look, I knew Wooje liked Hyeonjun for over a year and I didn’t do anything except drop hints for Minhyung. I wouldn’t have felt right running back and forth from Wooje to Hyeonjun.”

Jihoon deflated, “That makes sense. I think I’m just worried because I can’t understand him.” he glanced over at Sanghyeok again, who was smiling widely at Minhyung. The kind of smile that lit up his entire face and made him look five years younger, “He doesn’t smile at me like that.”

Minseok smacked him, “He also doesn’t read us books and blush when we stand too close to him. Stop making comparisons, do you *want* him to see you like he sees us? Because that would be incredibly weird.”

“You’re right, you’re right.” Jihoon sighed.

“Minseokie, are you still hungry?” Sanghyeok asked from across the room, “If not I’ll put away our leftovers.”

Minhyung pouted, “Why would you ask that hyung? Of course I made sure he ate enough while we were out. Don’t you trust me?” Sanghyeok didn’t say anything, just giving Minhyung an indulgent smile and beginning to pack up their leftovers.

“I’ll help you clean up,” Jihoon offered, immediately jumping off the couch, “You shouldn’t be doing chores, didn’t you already have to clean up earlier today?”

Sanghyeok looked amused, “I think I can handle putting away some boxes.”

“I want to do it anyway.” Jihoon insisted, “Sit down hyung. I’ll clean up.”

He pretended not to notice the thumbs up Minseok shot him from across the room and got to work packing up their leftovers and wiping down the table. He wasn’t sure if he was imagining it, but he was certain he felt Sanghyeok’s gaze burning into his back as he rinsed and dried the silverware.

“All done.” Jihoon said with a smile, “Do you think you could read me more of your book?”

“Of course, did you want to come to my room? I don’t want to bother Minseok and Minhyung.” he nodded over to where they were huddled closely on the couch, giggling as they watched something on Minseok’s phone. Jihoon nodded, feeling oddly excited as he followed Sanghyeok back to his room. There was something about being in the common area that felt so impersonal even when they were alone. Sanghyeok gestured for Jihoon to sit on the bed and moved to take a seat in his chair.

In a moment of impulsiveness, Jihoon reached out and grabbed him by the wrist, “Hyung, sit next to me.”

His entire body froze up and a brief panic flitted through his eyes when he glanced down at Jihoon's hand locked firmly around his wrist. His eyes snapped up to meet Jihoon's, pupils dilated. Jihoon smiled playfully and tugged lightly on Sanghyeok's arm, "Hyung? Aren't you going to come sit down?"

"Ah. Yes." Sanghyeok said in a dazed tone. It was almost impressive how his face morphed immediately into a practiced neutrality. It looked like someone putting on a mask. The tension drained out of his shoulders and he was nearly indiscernible from his usual composed self by the time he joined Jihoon on the bed. The only evidence he was bothered in the first place was the blush still staining his pale skin. Jihoon reluctantly let go of Sanghyeok's wrist but leaned close enough that their shoulders almost touched under the guise of seeing the book better. Sanghyeok's voice was louder from this distance. Something about the smooth and gentle cadence of his words both soothed and agitated Jihoon.

There was something serene about Sanghyeok's face as he continued to read. His eyes sloped elegantly, complementing the curve of his cheekbones and definition of his jaw. The smooth movement of his mouth was mesmerizing as words fell from his lips. Jihoon adored the unique double curve of his lips. They looked soft.

"Mm, this passage doesn't make much sense without the context provided previously." Sanghyeok mused, "Are you sure you're okay starting the book from the middle like this? I'd be happy to just lend it to you after I finished reading it."

"But then you wouldn't be the one reading it to me. That's my favorite part."

"Ah, I forgot. I can look for an audiobook version..." Sanghyeok trailed off when he finally noticed Jihoon watching him instead of the book. His mouth opened like he was going to speak but nothing came out.

"I'm not talking about audiobooks hyung," Jihoon said with a laugh, "I'm saying I like listening to you read. You specifically. You make the words pretty."

Sanghyeok's mouth snapped shut and he swallowed nervously, "Thank you. Perhaps I can voice audiobooks in my free time." His tone was an attempt at humor, but he couldn't fully mask the nervous tremor underneath his words.

“I think I’d prefer if I were the only one that got to hear it actually,” Jihoon said, trying his best to keep his tone casual and light despite his inner elation at the reaction he was eliciting. He was beginning to get addicted to this version of Sanghyeok. The version of him that was oddly vulnerable, flustered, and had his attention fixed on Jihoon and Jihoon only.

“I’m glad you like it.” Sanghyeok averted his gaze and closed his eyes. The movement of his shoulders was visible as he took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes again the composure had returned to his face, a perfectly pleasant and calm expression gracing his features. Jihoon couldn’t help but be impressed. And oddly excited. It felt like a challenge, and Jihoon was nothing if not ruthlessly competitive.

“You look tense hyung,” he leaned closer, “Am I making you nervous?”

“O-of course not, I enjoy your company a lot Jihoon-ah.” Sanghyeok’s eyes flickered upward in a feeble attempt at polite eye contact.

Jihoon chuckled under his breath, “I didn’t mean it in a bad way.”

“What did you mean?” Sanghyeok asked, successfully meeting Jihoon’s gaze without flinching this time. If it weren’t for the redness of his face Jihoon could almost believe he was perfectly calm.

Oh a whim, he reached out to cradle the side of Sanghyeok’s neck, drawing a startled gasp from the other man. He ran his thumb along the pale skin until he felt the rapid fluttering of a pulse.

“Not nervous huh?”

He could feel the movement of Sanghyeok’s throat under his touch when he swallowed, “That’s not how...you.....” he swallowed again, looking away.

“Not how I what?” Jihoon asked in a teasing voice, leaning even closer.

“It’s not how you take a p-pulse,” Sanghyeok said in an unsteady voice, “You can’t...you can’t use the thumb. The artery in it has its own pulse and it messes up the reading...”

“Mmm~ hyung is so smart.”

“I- thank you..” Sanghyeok said awkwardly, “That’s very kind of you to say.”

Deciding to show mercy, Jihoon finally pulled back, “Sorry hyung, am I making you uncomfortable?”

“Not at all,” Sanghyeok said, sounding genuine despite still looking flustered, “I’m not quite sure what’s up with me today. Usually I’m not quite so unfocused. I promise it’s not you, I think I might be running a fever.”

Jihoon bit back a laugh, he really was too adorable. It wasn’t good for Jihoon’s heart. “Do you think you’re coming down with something?” Jihoon asked, indulging him.

“Perhaps.” Sanghyeok pressed the back of hand against his cheek, “I feel a bit warm and I can’t think clearly. I was feeling a bit off yesterday too. Maybe you should keep a distance just in case you catch something.”

“Don’t worry about me hyung, I’m young and strong.”

“Ah, does that make me old and frail then,” Sanghyeok asked drily.

“You’re not that old.” Jihoon disagreed.

An oddly somber look passed through Sanghyeok's expression, "Is that so?"

Jihoon rolled his eyes, "28 isn't old."

"It depends," Sanghyeok said cryptically, "Don't worry about it Jihoon-ah. I'm not feeling very well, why don't you go find Minseok?"

His smile dropped. Was he getting kicked out?

He must've been making an interesting expression, because Sanghyeok immediately gave him a reassuring smile, "Don't make that face. I just need a moment to make sense of my condition. If I really am sick I don't want you catching anything. If not then I'll come find you after I rest a bit."

"I don't mind even if I get sick," Jihoon said, trying not to sound too desperate, "It's the offseason right? I don't have anything to do anyway."

Sanghyeok touched his arm lightly, "Don't worry, I'm not telling you to leave the dorms. That wouldn't be very kind of me when I know you aren't able to head back to your own place yet."

Jihoon clenched his fists, trying his best to keep his expression under control, "Do you want me to get someone else to come help you?"

"That's alright, I just need to lay down for a moment." Sanghyeok did look tired. His brow was creased like he was either in pain or deep in thought.

"Okay hyung," the words tasted bitter in his mouth, "But if you start feeling worse you'll call m- you'll...you'll call someone to help right?"

"I'll call you." Sanghyeok promised.

“Okay hyung.” Jihoon forced himself to say, “I hope you feel better.”

The sound of the door closing behind him was deafening.

#### Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone reading and leaving comments! I can't read them yet or I'll get self-conscious and chicken out posting the last chapter but I really appreciate every single one <3

# Chapter 9

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He wasn't sure how long he stood in the hallway outside Sanghyeok's room. A minute? Five minutes? An hour? Feeling the impatience and panic finally overflow, he stormed across the dorm to where he knew Minseok's room was located, "Ryu Minseok! Get out here."

A startled looking Minseok answered the door, a confused Minhyung right behind him, "What's happening?"

"I don't know! Sanghyeok hyung said he felt sick and then kicked me out. He looked really bothered about something. Or in pain. I really don't know. I can't tell if he's actually sick or not. Should I go get medicine just in case?" A cold shiver settled in his chest. What if he really was physically ill?

"Hyung is sick?" Minhyung said with a concerned expression, "Should I go check on him?"

"He told me not to get anyone."

"I don't care," Minhyung said, brushing past Jihoon, "I'm just going to make sure he's okay."

Jihoon wished he was able to do that. To stay even when Sanghyeok told him to leave.

"Hyung? Are you okay?" Minseok asked tentatively, "If it makes you feel better I don't think he's actually sick physically. Whenever he's stressed by something he likes to sit by himself and process his thoughts. It seems like it works well for him, even though I wish he would lean on us more."

"Do you think it's my fault?" Jihoon asked, looking down at the ground, "Maybe I pushed it too far?"

“I doubt it. For better or for worse he’s very good at dealing with people that push his boundaries, if you genuinely crossed a line he would have a more measured response. It’s probably something weighing on his mind. I’m guessing it has to do with you though. He seems like he really likes you, but people with the most responsibility have the hardest time letting themselves be happy.”

Jihoon laughed weakly, “When did you get so well spoken?”

Minseok smiled up at him, the kind of smile that made it seem like everything would be okay, “I talk to Sanghyeok hyung a lot. We’re both not too good at emotions, but on a logical level I think we understand each other the most. That’s probably why I took it so hard when he was injured last year.”

“You didn’t do that bad.”

Minseok wrinkled his nose, “Don’t you dare. I played like shit and you know it. It felt like I was missing half my brain. But I think that we’re similar in the sense that it’s hard to accept being happy.”

“Is that why you’re in denial about Minhyung?”

“That’s why I’m cautious when it comes to Minhyung,” Minseok corrected, “He’s the kindest and most amazing person I’ve ever met. I’m happy just being with him like this and I don’t want to ruin it by misinterpreting something. Besides, it’s hard to believe that I’m his best option. I’m prickly and bad at communication. I won’t even look at him when I’m angry and he has to do all the heavy lifting to fix things even when I was in the wrong.”

“Well if he knows that and is okay with it, who are you to make that decision for him?”

“Look at you giving relationship advice,” Minseok laughed, “Like you didn’t mistake your crush for hatred for a good week.”

Jihoon smiled, the action feeling less forced this time, “Hey! That’s not fair. I’ve studied a lot since then.”

Their conversation broke off when they saw Minhyung emerge from Sanghyeok’s room again. He approached them with a confused expression on his face, “Well, hyung isn’t sick at least. I don’t think.”

“What did he say?”

“He told me he was ‘pondering a problem that could not be solved’. He looked more amused than upset though. But not a good amused, a ‘this situation sucks so bad that it’s funny’ kind of amused.”

Minseok’s eyes widened, “He’s realized he has a crush.”

“What?” Jihoon and Minhyung both turned to Minseok with surprised looks, “How did you get that?”

“From what you described, he’s found himself in an absurd situation that doesn’t have a right answer. What else could be more absurd to Sanghyeok hyung than having a crush? He’s had no interest in anyone forever. The most gorgeous people in existence would approach him and he would have no interest at all! Most of the time when someone says they’re happy being single they’re coping but hyung was *actually* completely content without that kind of relationship.”

Minhyung chuckled, “I remember when you asked him about that and he said ‘why would I need that when I have you guys’. I swear the three of you stopped functioning for a good five minutes. I’m the only one here that can take a compliment I guess.”

“How was I supposed to react?” Minseok pouted, “I wasn’t ready for him to say something that sappy with such a matter of fact expression. That’s off topic anyway. The point is, Jihoon hyung has a real chance here.”

“I guess so.” Minhyung looked thoughtful, “I suppose I’ll have to be happy about it then. But not too happy, because someone has to beat you up if you ever break his heart. As his designated protective younger brother I’m not allowed to like you too much.”

“If I’m ever lucky enough to get a chance I would never hurt him.” Jihoon promised.

Minhyung looked satisfied with that, “I believe you. Don’t mess up.”

“Do you...do you think I messed up already?” Jihoon asked nervously, “You don’t think he’ll start avoiding me now?”

“Why are you guys standing in the hallway?”

The three of them jumped, trying their best not to look guilty when they turned to see Sanghyeok staring at them in confusion.

“How are you feeling?” Jihoon asked tentatively.

“I’m alright, just a headache.” Sanghyeok said dismissively. He sat down on the couch and Minseok immediately occupied the space next to him. He looped his arm through Sanghyeok’s and clung to it like it was a teddy bear, the contact seemed to make Sanghyeok relax a bit. Jihoon tried not to look sulky as he was left to take the spot next to Minhyung. “Do any of you know where Wooje and Hyeonjun are? It’s almost midnight, I’m worried about them.”

“They’re staying at a hotel tonight, about half an hour away from here.” Minseok piped up, voice a bit muffled from how his cheek was squished up against Sanghyeok’s shoulder, “Wooje messaged to tell me a while ago.”

Sanghyeok frowned, “Why wouldn’t he notify everyone?”

Minseok giggled, “I don’t think you want to know. The messages were pretty incoherent and contained a lot of his inner monologue.”

Sanghyeok cast a curious look over Minseok’s head, looking to Minhyung or Jihoon for an explanation. Minhyung laughed, “Ask Wooje about it when he comes back. I want to see the expression on his face when Sanghyeok hyung asks him about why he took Hyeonjun to a hotel.”

Minseok elbowed Minhyung lightly, “Don’t bully him, I’m sure he’s mortified enough.”

“So you’re sure we shouldn’t send a car to pick them up? They know that it’s no trouble right?” Sanghyeok checked.

Jihoon couldn’t help but melt at the adorably earnest expression on Sanghyeok’s face even as he horribly misinterpreted the situation.

“They’re probably too tired to think about a long car ride back.” Jihoon offered, “Amusement park lines can be pretty exhausting.”

“I see.” Sanghyeok nodded, accepting the explanation. He patted Minseok’s hair gently, “Minseokie, are you feeling tired? You shouldn’t sleep on the couch, it’ll hurt your neck.”

Minseok grumbled, not moving his head from its place on Sanghyeok’s shoulder, “Mm’comfortable. If I sleep Minhyungie will bring me to my room.”

“I’m okay you know.” Sanghyeok’s voice was soft.

Minseok didn’t respond, only tightening his grip on Sanghyeok’s sleeve.

"I'm okay." Sanghyeok repeated. He ran his fingers lightly through Minseok's hair. The action seemed to calm Minseok, a small sigh left his body and his grip relaxed.

An odd spark of jealousy lit in Jihoon's chest. He wished he could be so familiar and secure in his relationship with Sanghyeok. It felt almost like he was an outsider looking in on a snapshot of their life. In a way he was. What would it be like to take Minseok's place? To have Sanghyeok pet his hair gently and speak to him in that soft tone? Jihoon quickly quashed the thought down, mortified. It was definitely not the time and place to be having his fantasies.

Surprisingly, it was Minhyung who picked up on the prickly energy radiating off Jihoon. "Oh yeah, did you need to head home soon?" he asked, voice low as to not disturb Minseok, "When did you tell them you were getting back?"

"I said I'd be home past midnight." Jihoon said, "But I can leave early too if that's more convenient."

"Don't be ridiculous," Sanghyeok interjected, "We told you our dorm was open so long as you needed a place to stay. Are you feeling bored? You may borrow my computer if you'd like."

"Really?" Jihoon perked up, less interested in the internet access and more interested in a chance to be alone with Sanghyeok again, "Can I?"

"Of course." Sanghyeok smiled. He looked back down at Minseok, who was still curled against his side, now fast asleep. Moving slowly, he carefully extracted his arm from Minseok's grip and let Minhyung scoop the smaller boy off the couch.

Jihoon felt impatient as he followed Sanghyeok to his room. Minseok's words from earlier rang in his head. Could it really be true that Sanghyeok felt the same about him? Minseok hadn't been wrong about Sanghyeok yet, but this was an assumption too important to take lightly.

The door clicked shut behind them.

“Hyung? You’re sure you’re feeling okay now right?”

“Of course.” He was avoiding Jihoon’s gaze.

“I didn’t do anything wrong? You can tell me if I did.” Jihoon pressed.

Sanghyeok looked up at him, expression warm and genuine, “You did nothing wrong.” he promised, “If anything it’s me doing something wrong.”

“What do you mean?” Jihoon took a step closer. Sanghyeok didn’t move away.

He gave a tired smile, “Perhaps ‘wrong’ isn’t the most suitable word. There’s no need to assign morality when no transgression has taken place yet. You said you wanted to use the computer?”

“I didn’t, I just wanted to be alone with you again.” Jihoon said bluntly, “Hyung, whatever you think in your head you did ‘wrong’, I hope you know it’s not true. Especially if it has anything to do with...” Jihoon broke off, confidence wavering, “...if it has anything to do with me. Does it?”

“It’s not unrelated,” Sanghyeok admitted.

“You don’t have to tell me what it is until you want to,” Jihoon said quietly, “Just don’t tell me to leave again. If you were telling the truth when you said I didn’t do anything wrong, don’t tell me to leave.”

“Jihoon-”

"It wouldn't be fair would it?" Jihoon interrupted, "If I was punished for something I didn't have any control over? If someone else made a decision that impacted me without talking to me first? If someone decided what was 'best for me' without my input?"

Sanghyeok looked taken aback at his outburst, the slightest hint of guilt tainting his expression. He stared like that for a while. Jihoon stared back. He wondered what his expression looked like. Angry? Scared? Hopeful? Far too transparent for his own good?

"I wasn't going to." Sanghyeok said finally, "I wasn't going to ask you to leave. I understand that my problem is my problem."

"But why can't it be my problem too?" Jihoon pressed, "You said it was related to me right? Let me help."

To Jihoon's surprise, Sanghyeok laughed. A small, light sound. A cathartic, relieved sound. "I think..." Sanghyeok started, eyes filled with warmth, "I think you *are* helping. What you said earlier. It's made me realize the limitations in my own perspective. I'm sorry for making you worry."

Jihoon melted. It was as if all the tension in his body dissolved under Sanghyeok's warm gaze. He was suddenly filled with the overwhelming feeling that everything would be okay.

"Would you like to stay the night?"

Jihoon felt his brain short circuit. What did he say?

"I know you meant to leave after midnight, but I don't think it's very safe traveling at this time." Sanghyeok continued, oblivious to Jihoon's plight, "You can take the guest room. Everything should be clean if not a little bit dusty. What time do you usually sleep?"

"I don't sleep- I mean- I don't have a sleep time. Bed time, I mean. Time I go to bed. Usually. Consistently. I, uh, I sleep at different times every day." Jihoon explained, finally conveying

what he was trying to.

Sanghyeok nodded in understanding, not even seeming to notice the stuttering, “My kids are the same. They just sleep whenever they happen to be tired without considering the time of day at all. Unless we’re on a schedule, then I have to be a bit more strict with them.”

Jihoon’s mouth quirked into a smile, “Your kids?”

“Hm?”

“Nothing,” Jihoon smiled to himself, “I’m not very tired yet. If you want to sleep though I can let you have some peace and quiet.”

“No need. What would you like to do? You’re welcome to read anything I have or borrow my computer. I have a lot of things lying around my room, feel free to entertain yourself with anything you’d like. Whatever catches your eye.”

“Mm but wouldn’t that be you?” Jihoon teased.

Sanghyeok gave him a confused look, “You’d like me to read to you again? That’s alright with me, but don’t feel like you have to feign interest.”

“I’m not. I’m very interested” Jihoon said, pointedly ignoring the book on the bed and looking directly at Sanghyeok in hopes that he’d get the hint. He didn’t. Jihoon resisted the urge to pout, he felt like that one was pretty obvious. At least this time Sanghyeok didn’t try to retreat to his chair, picking up the book and automatically taking a seat next to Jihoon instead.

“What is he to her, or her to him, that he should weep for her?” Sanghyeok began, words falling from his lips in a mesmerizing lull, “What would he do, had he the motive and cue for passion that I have?”

Jihoon once again found himself watching Sanghyeok instead of the words printed across the page. They were more beautiful on his lips anyway. Every word was poetry and every sound a melody. Jihoon didn't realize how intensely he had been staring until Sanghyeok tripped over his words, casting a flustered glance at Jihoon.

"Jihoon? You're, um," Sanghyeok cleared his throat, "You've been staring. Is there something on my face?"

"Yeah." Jihoon said, feeling like he was in a daze as he reached out and cupped the side of Sanghyeok's face. He ran his thumb slowly and gently across the soft curve of his lower lip, "Right here."

Sanghyeok was wide eyed as he stared at Jihoon, frozen in place.

"Hyung, you're so pretty." Jihoon whispered. He could feel Sanghyeok tense at the compliment. A shaky smile flitted across his lips, "Thank you Jihoon-ah. You...you are as well."

Something about seeing Sanghyeok flustered like this did inexplicable things to his brain chemistry. His lips curved into a teasing smile, confidence running hot through his veins at the sight, "You can't steal my compliment, hyung. That's disingenuous. You have to come up with your own."

Jihoon swore he could feel Sanghyeok's skin heat up beneath his fingertips.

"You're very..." Sanghyeok swallowed nervously, "Cute. You're very cute."

"I don't think I want you to call me cute." Jihoon murmured, hand moving downwards. His fingers curled around the nape of Sanghyeok's neck, grip firm enough that the other man wouldn't be able to move away if he ever unfroze enough to try, "I don't like that word right now. It makes me feel...too young. I want you to see me differently. I'm not one of your kids Sanghyeok hyung. I'm not that young. Not that innocent."

“I-I’m not sure what you’re trying to say Jihoon-ah.” Sanghyeok said in an unsteady voice.

“Are you attracted to me?”

Sanghyeok tensed, guilt flooding his expression, “I don’t- Why are you asking?”

Jihoon leaned closer, his hold on the back of Sanghyeok’s neck making sure he couldn’t pull away, “Are you?”

“You’re very...” Sanghyeok looked at Jihoon helplessly, “I’m sorry. I promise I never had any ill intentions. Or any ulterior motives at all. I know it was wrong to think of you that way when you were only being friendly, but I couldn’t.... *not* see you that way. Not when you look the way you do and act so..close. Friendly.”

“Wait,” Jihoon recoiled like he had been punched, his hand finally dropping from where it was holding Sanghyeok in place, “What?”

“I’m sorry-”

“No. Hyung. Stop. What are you- what did I- am I hearing you correctly?” Jihoon gave him an incredulous look, “First of all, where did you get the idea that I was ‘only being friendly’? I’ve been throwing myself at you for a week now!”

Sanghyeok’s eyes widened, “Wh-”

“Second of all,” Jihoon interrupted, “Why would it be wrong of you to think of me that way? It’s not because I’m a guy right? This isn’t the 1600’s. Or, uh, some places in the present.” Jihoon amended, “But that’s not the point. Why are you apologizing?”

The guilty panic on Sanghyeok's face was now replaced with a blank confusion, "Because... it felt like I was taking advantage of you? I'm a lot older than you are, and you seemed like you were really struggling when you first came to talk to me. The fact that I started to see you in a... *different* light. It felt inappropriate and predatory."

Jihoon suddenly felt an overwhelming flood of fondness and adoration alongside relief and exasperation, "Hyung, do you know why I was struggling when I first started seeking you out?"

Sanghyeok shook his head.

"Because I had a crush on you and I had no idea how to get you to like me back."

His mouth fell open in a silent 'oh' and his cheeks flushed in embarrassment. "That changes the situation I suppose." Sanghyeok mumbled under his breath. Jihoon wasn't sure he'd ever seen someone turn such a vibrant shade of red. He was practically glowing with mortification.

"So do you? Like me back?" Jihoon asked hopefully, the slightest curl of doubt still prickling at his heart.

Sanghyeok glanced cautiously over at Jihoon, looking more uncertain than Jihoon had ever seen him, "Can I?"

Jihoon reached out to cradle his face again, "Of course. I'm all yours. For as long as you want me."

Then he kissed him. Soft and sweet. Sanghyeok's lips were just as soft as they looked. Jihoon placed a second kiss at the corner of Sanghyeok's mouth, then moved upwards to brush his lips against the curve of his cheekbone. His jaw. Neck. Hands. Then his lips again.

"Forever then?" Sanghyeok said, sounding flustered and out of breath, "Earlier. You said.....as long as I wanted....." he trailed off, embarrassed.

Jihoon paused, taking a second to register what Sanghyeok was saying. He laughed when he realized, leaning back in to kiss the uncertainty off the other man's face, "Forever. I promise."

Bonus:

Hyeonjun: Why did I just see Jihoon walk out of Sanghyeok hyung's room????

Wooje: o.o

Hyeonjun: Did he spend the night?????

Minseok: calm down and don't do anything stupid

Hyeonjun: I'm gonna beat him up.

Wooje: \(^o^)/

Wooje: You got this hyung!

Minhyung: Don't encourage him!

Wooje: :3c

Wooje: but it's hot when he flexes on people

Minseok: ...

Minseok: ew

Wooje: you can't judge me

Wooje: remember what you said last week

Wooje: about a certain lane partner of yours

Minseok: WOOJE YOU'RE DEAD

...

...

...

Minhyung: You don't think he was talking about Deft do you?

Minhyung: :(

Hyeonjun: ???

Hyeonjun: Dude

Hyeonjun: No

Hyeonjun: are you dumb

Hyeonjun: *Sigh*

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I wrote this for myself at first so I had a lot of reservations about posting. However, I'm now really happy I decided to.

I have a few other ideas running through my head right now so if you want to give any input on what direction I should take or any prompts I should write feel free to let me know :) I'll write ideas I'm considering below but also feel free to suggest anything else! All inspiration is good inspiration.

The current ideas are:

1. A/B/O setting, a bit of a longer story with more mature themes
2. Soulmate au, probably around the same length as this one and just as fluff focused
3. Something completely alternate universe and separated from esports/real world stuff altogether

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!